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Writing the Revolution : Poulantzas and the Political Project

Description

'Writing the Revolution: Poulantzas and the Political Project' is an extended unpublished monograph on the theoretical work of Nicos Poulantzas. In a shortened version it came to be two chapters from 'The State: a Biography', forthcoming, from Cambridge Scholars Press.

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Writing the Revolution : Poulantzas and the Political Project.

1. Context and Biography.

There is an unmistakable sense of urgency in the writing of Nicos Poulantzas. Curiously, he was not writing to get tenure – the universe he inhabited was entirely different. He wrote from his experience in Greece, as well as the setting he found himself in Paris., with an intent to understand how revolution could happen, and what might bring it about. Such reasoning seems antique and out of place from the perspective of 21st century late capitalism. But the world in which Poulantzas grew up was, in some ways, entirely different. While many had blithely assumed that, with the overthrow of Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese Empire, that an era dominated by fascist dictatorships had come to an end, no-one raised in Greece after World War Two could reasonably entertain such a view. Indeed, dictatorship remained in the heart of Europe well after 1945, sporadically in Greece, but consistently in Portugal and Spain. In Portugal, a military dictatorship came to power in 1926, and lasted, in various forms, until 1974. In Spain, a long and bitter civil war had resulted in the rise of General Francisco Franco in 1939, who then maintained his power until 1974. In Greece, the 4th of August Régime had been established as an authoritarian government from 1936 until 1941, and from 1967 until 1974 ‘The Régime of the Colonels’ came to power, which was, if not formally fascist, then certainly did meet all the criteria for a dictatorship.

These three active dictatorships, which soon became the focus of attention for Poulantzas,¹ brought an immediacy to his writings that was compelling. In the introduction to *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, he comments :

The past two years in Europe have witnessed a series of events of considerable significance: the overthrow of the military dictatorships in Portugal and Greece; and the accelerated decay of the Franco régime in Spain, so that its overthrow is now also on the historical agenda.

Both the path taken by the fall of the Portuguese and Greek dictatorships, and the process now under way in Spain, raise a number of important questions which are still far from being resolved. The basic pivot in these is as follows. The Portuguese and Greek regimes were evidently not overthrown by an open and frontal movement of the popular masses in insurrection, nor by a foreign military intervention, as was the case with Italian fascism and Nazism in Germany. What then are the

¹ See especially *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, New Left Books, 1976, London. (First published by Maspero in Paris in 1975) The earlier *Fascism and Dictatorship* text, which was published in 1970 (Maspero, Paris) looks back to Italian and German fascism, whereas *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* writes about contemporary conditions as Poulantzas found them in the mid-1970's. The continuing existence of fascism and these three dictatorships leads Poulantzas to take up many of the same themes that had concerned Gramsci. Indeed, there are many references to Gramsci in Poulantzas's writing. Poulantzas was criticised by Althusser for his Gramscian tendencies. The connections between the two are inescapable.

factors that determined their overthrow, and what form has the intervention of the popular masses taken in this conjuncture?²

Poulantzas was in the middle of these struggles, and the intensity of his interest could not be clearer. We must remember how Poulantzas came to be writing these books. He had been born in Athens in 1936, and was a child during the Second World War. He was born into a prominent Greek family. He came to maturity in Greece during the 1950's. He moved to France when he was 25 in 1961. James Martin³ usefully highlights the key biographical elements of this period : start here.

Poulantzas was born in Athens on 21 September 1936. He grew to adolescence during a turbulent period which encompassed the authoritarian regime of General Ioannis Metaxas in the late 1930s, followed by the Nazi puppet regime during the war, the civil war of 1946-49 and the Western-backed, conservative democracy of the 1950s ... Graduating in law from the University of Athens in 1957 and, following compulsory military service, he set off in 1960 to undertake doctoral studies in German legal philosophy in Munich. That decision was soon aborted, however, and Poulantzas relocated to Paris, the home of a large Greek diaspora that included figures such as Kostas Axelos, Cornelius Castoriadis and other exiled left-wing intellectuals. Poulantzas enrolled as a teaching assistant at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne and continued his research on law, submitting a *mémoire de doctorat* in 1961 on natural law theory in Germany after the Second World War. By 1964 he had completed his doctoral thesis, published in the following year as his first book, *Nature des choses et droit: essai sur la dialectique du fait et de la valeur*.

Poulantzas came from an academic background. His father, Aristedes Poulantzas, was a 'forensic graphologist' and a 'leading figure in Greek legal establishment'.⁴ His mother, according to Jessop, was a traditional woman who ran the house and stayed at home. He was a brilliant student, destined, one imagines, to go far from an early age :

His secondary schooling was undertaken at an experimental school, the Peiramaticon Gymnasium, attached to the University of Athens, and at the local Institut Français, where he studied for the Baccalaureate. He had already acquired fluency in the French tongue through private lessons. He graduated first among Greek students of the 'Bac' in his year and obtained 'very good' in both the general examination and the second, philosophical part.⁵

There is no full-length biography of Poulantzas available in English as far as can be established. Bob Jessop has perhaps the most detailed account of these early days.⁶ Poulantzas was an early believer in socialism – where precisely these ideas came from is unclear. Liam O'Ruairc reports that his family were major landowners, and that his father was a senior legal official in the 'Régime of the Colonels'.⁷ Perhaps, though, his family's involvement in this notoriously autocratic régime was instrumental in shaping his thinking – this certainly seems plausible. In any event, it is clear that Poulantzas completed his early training in law in 1957.⁸ Jessop's account tells us that, in line with many young Greek intellectuals, disaffection with Greek politics and with Greek intellectual life led

² *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, op. cit., (now referred to as CD), page 7. This is the second of his books on fascism. It is telling to read the tone of this text. It is cautious, lacking any intellectual hubris, or any sense that a final analysis has been made. The introduction emphasises the preliminary nature of the remarks. He calls the work only an essay, even though it runs for 162 pages. He also ends the introduction by admitting he has had a change of mind since he wrote *Fascism and Dictatorship*, not just because conditions have changed, but also because his views have altered.

³ James Martin (editor), *The Poulantzas Reader ; Marxism, Law and the State*. Verso, London and New York, 2008.

⁴ These words come from Bob Jessop's *Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*, Palgrave, 1985, London, 1985, page 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 6.

⁶ Op. cit. Much of this material is based on Jessop's introduction, from his 1985 book, pages 3-24.

⁷ See footnote 1, Introduction.

⁸ Jessop, page 7.

them to seek training elsewhere, and he followed many of his contemporaries in moving to Germany, and then, very quickly, to Paris. During this time, he was clearly affected by the leftist currents flowing through the intellectual sphere, and in its early manifestation, this infatuation led him to Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and existentialism.⁹ It is also fairly clear that Poulantzas exhibited some relatively orthodox male attitudes towards women, and spent much of his time in romantic entanglements, a trend that was to carry through to his life in Paris, and on into his marriage to Annie Leclerc.¹⁰ In Paris, he did his first post-graduate thesis on a legal topic, and his legal training seemed a useful precursor to wider concerns, not just with law, but with the broader apparatus of the State. His first major piece of graduate research was on 'The Rebirth of Natural Law in Germany after the Second World War',¹¹ followed by his doctoral dissertation entitled 'The Nature of Things and Law : an essay on the dialectic of fact and value'.¹²

Poulantzas, who was now teaching law at the University Pantheon-Sorbonne, was becoming heavily involved in both the politics and in the thinking of left intellectuals in Paris in the early 1960's, and this could only mean Sartrean existentialism.¹³ Sartre was a dominant figure of the left during this period. His particular brand of existentialism focused on the essential nature of human existence – what does it take to make us human? In *Being and Nothingness*,¹⁴ Sartre claimed that all human existence takes place in a social situation, but is not entirely conditioned by it. Individuals experience freedom to act in a variety of ways, and each of these choices is an expression of that freedom. Indeed, we are doomed to choose – we don't have any choice about that!¹⁵ Human life comprises a series of choices that constitute a life project, and this system of choices forms a structure of meaning for individuals. But choices always invoke ethical decisions, and these choices are not to be left to the theory of the unconscious to be explained. Freud had proposed that ethical decisions often arise from the unconscious, and were the result of conditioning which was not understood by the individual. Sartre would have none of this. For him, the choices that we make were ethical choices, and we were responsible for them. Freud's argument denied the role of individual responsibility. Sartre argued for the opposite position. We were fully and consciously responsible for the choices we made. These choices we made create the values we embodied, and

⁹ Jessop, op.cit., pages 7-8.

¹⁰ He married the writer Annie Leclerc in Paris on the 6th of November 1966. Jessop comments : 'It was also during this period that Poulantzas married the 'budding novelist', Annie Leclerc. They met for the first time in 1963 and were married on the 6th December, 1966. Their daughter, Ariane, was born on 2nd July, 1970.' Jessop, page 10. Leclerc was an important philosopher within the feminist movement who claimed that the entire construction of feminism originated in the masculine mind, and that women should learn to celebrate their everyday lives, rather than mimic men in the 'public world of achievement'. Becoming 'men', Leclerc famously claimed, was no great advance for women, and the notion that the 'hard, tough, public world' of business, politics and law was somehow valorized against the small, private and soft world of domestic life was a distinction to be directly challenged. This line of reasoning turned Leclerc into a feminist dissident, a dissident within the movement itself. Some saw that this line of reasoning merely reinforced old systems of patriarchy. Others saw it as a radical critique, from the 'left' of feminism. She took a break from academic life to write novels.

¹¹ Jessop, page 9.

¹² Jessop, 10.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir sat at the center of a group of writers and thinkers, and ran the journal *Les Temps Modernes*, to which Poulantzas contributed. Their famously open marriage showed the way forward to many of their acolytes, and their critique of bourgeois lifestyle, of which they were both products, sat easily with the leftism of Poulantzas and others. It readily bridged the gap between personal challenges, the reinvention of marriage, and progressive politics.

¹⁴ *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1958) transl. Hazel E. Barnes, intr. Mary Warnock, Methuen, London.

¹⁵ *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, recovered at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sartre-ex/#H3> on September 28, 2016.

this creation of values has a social element to it, because these values could be understood, and perhaps taken up, by other people.

In *Critique of Dialectical Reasoning*¹⁶ Sartre extended this argument in a political direction. If we think of political life as an extension of the individual life project that people undertake, we can begin to see that while people are born into a given social world, a given social structure, social expectations, class structures, a particular moment in history, and so on, this is merely a beginning. Their individual projects act against the existing order and ‘negate’ the old, in Sartre’s terms. How far this individual can go in this reconstruction is very much a product of the condition in which they find themselves. It is obviously constrained, by class, gender, sometimes religion, ethnicity and other structural limits. This argument clearly narrows the wider freedoms he argued for in *Being and Nothingness*. In Sartre’s political philosophy, which resulted from his war experience, we see a movement towards Marxism, and it is in this original synthesis of existentialism and Marxism that his contribution lies. He accepted the importance of social classes, but he denied that all human behaviour could be reduced to economic class differences, as some were proposing after World War Two. Class analysis, combined with an understanding of the individual project, the personal history, might do the trick.

What is important about the Sartrean contribution is that, in the movement from existentialism to a kind of modified structuralism, Sartre injects the individual back into class structure. While he was always of the left, and briefly established his own leftist, non-communist party in the 1940s, he refused to accept that all human behaviour could be reduced to structure, to social class, to economics. Instead, he claimed that all struggles, whether they be about social class, economic scarcity, relations between men and women or whatever else, should not merely be seen as struggles of systems, but as battles between living, breathing people, full of their own desires and challenges, constrained by the world they lived in, and its objective choices. This way of thinking was to influence Poulantzas as he began to write less about the law, and more about the State.

Poulantzas’s early writing on the State is strongly influenced by several currents. He came to Paris under the influence of a traditional Marxist-Leninist philosophy, in which it was assumed that the revolution would take place under the management of the vanguard party, replete with intellectuals, not unlike Poulantzas himself, and that the dictatorship of the proletariat would follow. This would result from a ‘War of Manoeuvre’, a phrase we have met before in Gramsci’s work, which implies a direct assault on the State, and its subsequent collapse.¹⁷ But it is clear from his writing that he never fully succumbed to this orthodoxy, even though it was the prevailing current of thought among communist parties following the Soviet line, including the KKE, the exterior branch of the Communist party of Greece. His association with the Sartre-de Beauvoir group must have pushed this resistance further away from this orthodoxy in the direction of human subjectivity, agency and choice. Yet, as he came under the influence of Althusser, a pressure to consider the importance of structure was brought to bear. These contradictory currents of thought manifest themselves in the early writings on the State.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Critique of Dialectical Reason 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles* (1982) transl. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée, Verso, London.

¹⁷ Jessop, op. cit., 11.

¹⁸ I am concerned here only with his five major books, and I exclude many of the articles he wrote at this time.

There are five major books to consider. The first of his major writings on the State that came to light was *Political Power and Social Classes*,¹⁹ published in France in 1968, and according to Jessop's account, widely available to students as they took to the barricades in the quasi-revolution in Paris of that year. Whether many of them understood this dense and extraordinarily complex book is another matter.²⁰ The second book to be published was *Fascism and Dictatorship*, published in 1970 in Paris as *Fascisme et Dictatures*, and which looks back at the situation in Germany and Italy under the fascist régimes. This was followed by *Les Classes Sociales Dans le Capitalisme Aujourd'hui*, published in France in 1973. With the fall of the dictatorships in 1974, Poulantzas naturally returned to his study of fascism with *La Crise des Dictatures*, which appeared in 1975. Then, in his final major work, he tried to respond to the rise of Michel Foucault in his *L'Etat, Le Pouvoir, Le Socialisme*, a book that appeared in Paris in 1978, just one year before his death.

I take these books out of sequence. I turn, first of all, to his assessment of fascism as a logical step from Gramsci's own similar preoccupations. Then I look at his two books on the contemporary State and social class – *Political Power and Social Classes*, and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, and I end with his final riposte to his critics, a case that he sets out in *State, Power, Socialism*.

2. Poulantzas and Early Fascism : *Fascism and Dictatorship*

In 1970, Poulantzas was living through a tumultuous period, not just in Paris, where the events of 1968 were still ringing in his ears, but also through his connections in Greece, where the régime of the colonels was stumbling towards its end. He was deeply involved in both these political systems, both as a self-proclaimed militant, and as a theorist. His life seems to have been a mixture of lively social activity of various kinds, of political engagement at several levels, and of the most serious intellectual activity. A colleague of this time told me informally that his days had a clear pattern. He would rise late, have a drink on the way to the campus, teach, then, in the afternoon, work a little, socialize and meet with friends and colleagues. In the evening, he would go to meetings, social gatherings and public occasions before going home to work intensely until the early hours of the morning. No-one who has read Poulantzas seriously can accuse him of being a foppish dilettante. However he did it, how he found time for his family, his friends, his political activities, his teaching, and still produced so much work is unclear. Whatever his method of getting things done, his intellectual work is of the most extraordinary quality, reflecting his already-established and deep commitment to scholarly work. Like Gramsci, it is full of highly original ideas.

In 1970, Poulantzas published *Fascism and Dictatorship*. Presumably he had been working on this text for some years, and doubtless back beyond 1968, which is somewhat surprising. It is surprising because it seems to be little connected with the events of the day. It looks back to the pre-war period, and particularly to Italy and Germany. He takes this issue head-on in his early remarks.

¹⁹ *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*, (Maspero, Paris, 1968) The English language version is *Political Power and Social Classes*. His reputation was widely enhanced as a result of his debate with Miliband in *New Left Review* in 1969 in the wake of this first book. We shall review this debate at a later stage when we discuss *Political Power and Social Classes*. (NLB, 1978). See also Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship : The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*. NLB, 1974. (originally published in 1970); *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. NLB, 1975 (originally published in 1973) ; *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Greece, Spain*. Humanities Press, 1976 ; Poulantzas, Nicos. *State, Power, Socialism*. NLB, 1978.

²⁰ Jessop, pages 12-13.

Why, he asks, should we be studying fascism right now in 1970?²¹ But his answer is not immediately clear. He believes that the international system of imperialism is in crisis, and that this crisis ‘is only just beginning but ... already reaches into the imperialist heartlands themselves’.²² But unless the imperialist system was about to turn to fascism, the urgent necessity to write this book on fascism at this particular juncture is still not in evidence. It is clear, as he says that ‘the question of revolution is on the agenda’²³, but it isn’t at all clear that fascism is on the horizon. Indeed, within the next five years, the dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal were all to fall.

What, asks Poulantzas, is the Soviet Comintern’s²⁴ policy on Fascism? This will be one of the central concerns of the book. But Poulantzas also hopes to elucidate the broad nature of the capitalist State itself :

... the study of fascism as a specific phenomenon of crisis makes it possible to elucidate certain aspects of the very nature of the capitalist State.²⁵

Fascism, Poulantzas begins, is a phenomenon of a certain stage of capitalism, according to the Comintern. It is the imperialist stage of capitalism, and in Lenin’s theory, the highest stage of capitalism.²⁶ Poulantzas then engages in a long dispute with the economism²⁷ of Lenin and the Third International. Here he sets out a clear separation from the orthodoxy of Moscow :

Imperialism ... is not a phenomenon which can be reduced to economic developments alone. To put it more strongly : only in so far as one sees imperialism as a *phenomenon with economic, political and ideological implications*, can the internationalization of social relations particular to this stage be understood.²⁸

Poulantzas has immediately opened the door to a wider understanding of State functioning, an understanding that must consider cultural, political and ideological elements, as well as the economic conditions. It was an understanding that had already been offered by Gramsci. Poulantzas wants to argue that fascism arises in Italy and Germany because these two states constituted the weakest links in the imperialist chain. In both cases, industrialization came late, and in both cases the countries were dramatically weakened economically by the effects of the First World War. Here we see the first signs of Gramsci’s influence.²⁹ In the Poulantzian view, the Soviet Comintern failed to grasp

²¹ *Fascism and Dictatorship*, (FD), page 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The ‘Comintern’ is an abbreviation for the Communist International, or the Third International, an international communist organization that Lenin, Stalin and the Soviet Government supported through several congresses. It was dissolved in 1943. The aim of the Third international was to fight “by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State”. From <http://spartacus-educational.com/RUScomintern.htm>. Recovered September 29, 2016.

²⁵ FD, 12.

²⁶ FD, 18. Lenin, V.I. *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1963, Moscow, Volume 1, pp. 667-766.

²⁷ The reduction of all social facts to economic facts. In historical materialism, it often refers to the reduction of causes to a single material cause. Poulantzas wants to argue more causes were at work than the merely economic, even if these economic causes were also important.

²⁸ FD, 22. My italics.

²⁹ FD, 31.

what was going on, and made a fatal error in judgement.³⁰ Fascism is ‘a form of State and of regime at the extreme ‘limit’ of the capitalist State.’³¹ For Gramsci, Poulantzas reminds us, the Italian political crisis is characterized by a crisis of hegemony, which leads to the rise of a new form of State and a new dictatorial leader. The bourgeois class have already lost, and the working class has not yet gained the ability to govern the nation.³²

The writing in *Fascism and Dictatorship* may be obscure, but the structure is straightforward enough. Having spent the first sixty pages setting up the problematic,³³ and arguing with the Comintern position, Poulantzas deals with the dominant class, the working class and the petty bourgeoisie in turn, each as they relate to fascism. He ends with sections on the countryside and a general discussion of the fascist state. Let us therefor consider each of these three class relations one by one, following the logic of his exposition.

Fascism and the Dominant Classes

In his section on the dominant classes,³⁴ Poulantzas begins by arguing that in capitalism, a complex class structure presents itself, and that a ‘power bloc’ must be formed of various classes and fractions of classes for there to exist a functioning dominant class. The nature of this power bloc will determine the nature of the State.³⁵ Economic analysis on its own will not suffice ; we will need also to deal with political and ideological issues. Fascism is defined by the way in which the class struggle has become politicized.³⁶ This is a very Gramscian moment, because Poulantzas is replicating the Gramscian argument that, at a particular moment in history, such as the post-war moment in Italy, no single element of the class structure can manage to gain hegemony, and that this situation provides the gateway for fascism to enter, for the rise of a ‘Master’.

We should start by asking what exactly we are talking about here. When Poulantzas starts talking about the dominant classes, he takes a good deal for granted. We perhaps should begin by asking what constitutes the dominant class – what are its elements? A major component of the ‘dominant class’ is clearly the category Marx called the bourgeoisie. In *The Communist Manifesto*³⁷ Marx and Engels assert that the rise of capitalism and industrialization brings into being a new class of people who own this industry, and thus dominate the new economy. The new bourgeois class not only own and control the new industry, but they bring with them a dominant ideology, a controlling set of ideas. Within this class, however, we may distinguish several components. Poulantzas often refers to monopoly capitalism, and monopoly capitalists. This is a familiar term in wide use in Marxist circles, and it defines those businesses that dominate a particular sector without

³⁰ *FD*, chapter three. Poulantzas then exhaustively sets out the positions of Lenin, and members of the various congresses of the Comintern, from 1922 to 1928. The result is that the communist movements in Germany and Italy also failed to understand the true nature of fascism in their countries.

³¹ *FD*, 57.

³² *FD*, 60-61.

³³ A term widely used in Marxism, and stemming from French philosophy which means to set up a question, and the method for solving that question, or, more usually, a matrix of questions connected by a system of logic.

³⁴ *FD*, 71-135.

³⁵ In his earlier book *Political Power and Social Classes*, the definition of the ‘power bloc’ has already been established. (See pages 296-303.)

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ Marx, K., Engels, F., Harvey, D., & Moore, S. (2008). *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Pluto Press. First published in London in 1848.

competition. Monopoly capitalism allows a few large companies to dominate economy and society. Oligopoly refers to the situation where several large companies agree not to compete, and to divide the spoils between them. It is thus a close relative of monopoly capitalism. Lenin claimed that the First World War allowed these large companies to emerge with the support of the State, and proposed that this was capitalism's plan for the future. Poulantzas considers this possibility in detail as it refers to fascism. Could it be that the fascist State and monopoly capitalism could merge into one? Poulantzas also mentions finance capitalism, by which he means bankers and those who provide the funds for capitalist development. One of his major contributions is the notion that the dominant class, comprising these and other fractions of the ruling category, need to organize a 'power bloc' in order to constitute a proper ruling class, and that without it, they are rudderless.

Now that we have some sense of what Poulantzas meant by the dominant class, let us now consider the rise of fascism, and the dominant class's role in it. Following Gramsci, Poulantzas points to the conditions of the political parties at this crucial juncture, hopelessly unable any more to represent the will of the people they are alleged to represent.³⁸ In the early stages of the rise of fascism, Poulantzas sees emerge, within the State itself, new forms of organization that seem to parallel the structures of the bourgeois parties, such that the emerging State appears to fashion itself into the shape of bourgeois interests. But the bourgeois class are still in a very difficult situation. They can no longer represent the interests of their own people, and they are falling further into the hands of the new régime. Here is Poulantzas's very lively description of the situation :

Cut off from (the people they represent) ... puppets in the death agonies of parliamentary cretinism, their fear of the working class only sharpens their delirium. It is a situation which, before fascism comes into power, often gives rise to episodes of unprecedented bedlam.³⁹

Fascism arises, therefore when there is a '*crisis in the dominant ideology*'.⁴⁰ In traditional Marxist circles, ideology was taken to mean the ideas of a particular class, and especially the ruling class. But here he is taking its use in the Gramscian direction by talking about hegemony and ideology simultaneously. The dominant ideology permeates every level of society, so that when there is a crisis of ideology, that crisis affects everyone. Indeed, the ruling elements of society start to doubt their own beliefs – the ideological crisis is profound. The steps in the rise to fascism can now be clearly spelt out. The first is the defeat of the working class, then, second, a period of relative stability, and third, the establishment of fascism itself is accompanied by a move by the bourgeois class to take the offensive.⁴¹ Fascism thus represents a solution to a bourgeois crisis. And Poulantzas wants to argue that the rise of fascism is not a result of a simple military takeover but rather it is :

... a mass movement with deep social roots. It must be stressed that before fascism wins militarily, it has already won the ideological and political victory over the working class.⁴²

³⁸ The Poulantzas reference is to *Prison Notebooks*, page 210.

³⁹ *FD*, page 75.

⁴⁰ *FD*, page 76.

⁴¹ *FD*, pages 79-81. Again, Poulantzas wants to continue to argue with the Comintern position that the rise of fascism means that big monopoly capital has total control of the fascist State. In this view the State merely becomes the agent of this class fraction. Too simple, cries Poulantzas, because the State then has no 'relative autonomy' from the 'power bloc and its hegemonic fraction.' (*FD*, page 83). Poulantzas is attacking simple instrumentalism here – the idea that the State is merely the instrument of the ruling class. This reflects his debate with Miliband, which we discuss in more detail below.

⁴² Poulantzas is quoting Clara Zetkin, 23 June, 1923, address to the executive committee of the Comintern.

Nor is fascism to be understood merely as the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie, the small landowners and self-employed business people. Instead, Poulantzas wants to claim that the fascist State instead has some independence, some ‘relative autonomy’ from the ruling elements of society. It gains relative autonomy, not just from the dominant part of the ruling class, but also from the various elements of other classes who have now been subordinated.

As time passes, and fascism establishes itself further, it becomes clear that this new State does not represent the interests of all elements of society. The domination of the monopoly fraction of capital becomes more clear. The small owning class, (the petty bourgeoisie) easily fit within the new arrangements. Indeed, Poulantzas goes as far as to say that the petty bourgeoisie becomes ‘the ruling class’ – ‘the class in charge of the state’⁴³ – for a period. But this moment quickly passes when we reach a period of fascist stability :

The period of the stabilization of fascism. The monopoly capital fraction establishes its hegemony and also achieves the status of *ruling class* ... dislodging the petty-bourgeoisie.⁴⁴

Poulantzas argues that the petty-bourgeoisie ‘continues to be in charge of the State’⁴⁵, by which I take him to mean they provide the personnel for state office, but nonetheless the ruling bloc is now governed by monopoly capital. Poulantzas thus insists both on the *periodicity* of State formation – that there are stages of development that need to be understood, rather than imagining an almost instantaneous emergence of the new State, but also he wants to claim that there are *complex relations between the governing elements of society and the State*. The State is not merely the plaything of monopoly capital, as some in the communist party had claimed. Rather, the State is engaged in an elaborate balancing act, seeking to sustain its position as the unifying element in a complex class structure, each element of which must be brought into the fold. The State is not merely a crude instrument of capital. For it to survive, it must maintain its relative autonomy, even from the rulers.

This is a fascinating section. Poulantzas’s theory of the ‘relative autonomy of the State’ is widely used elsewhere in explanations of how ‘normal’ democratic societies hold together. Poulantzas’s powerful claim is that they do so by balancing the requirements of both rulers and dominated, not through some simple harmonious agreement, but by making necessary concessions to workers so that basic needs are met. Capitalist interests still hold sway, so this is no simple equilibrium, in which everyone gets what they want. Rather, it is a political necessity if capitalism is to survive. But here Poulantzas is extending his argument to the ‘exceptional’ State under fascism. Even here, where the monopoly of violence is so openly in the hands of the State, it is not enough merely to bully those who are dominated into submission. Instead, following Gramsci, he insists that even under these conditions, hegemonic acceptance must be maintained by all parties, and the State must retain its relative autonomy from the rulers of society.

Poulantzas then turns to the case studies of Germany and Italy in turn to illustrate these general propositions. In Germany, he sees the rise of monopoly capital⁴⁶ as one of the preconditions for the

⁴³ FD, 87.

⁴⁴ FD, 87.

⁴⁵ FD, 88.

⁴⁶ By ‘Monopoly Capitalism’, Marxists here refer to a later stage of capitalist development than that widely discussed by Marx. One line of argument suggests that competition defined the era in which Marx wrote, and this era of competition had largely disappeared by the 20th. century, with the rise of large, dominant corporations that overwhelmed their

rise of fascism. The rise of monopolies gave rise to sharpened class conflict.⁴⁷ First, these class struggles involved battles between business owners (the bourgeoisie) and large landowners. Landowners lost power, and industrialists gained power. Then, legislation that controlled rents had the effect of reducing income to landowners.⁴⁸ And landowners had to mechanize to survive, placing them further in debt. Coupled with the control over prices for agricultural produce that monopolies held, the future was grim for the landowners. Small and medium businesses tried to ally with rural interests, but these efforts were not successful.⁴⁹

... the whole economic policy of national socialism in this field was aimed at *cementing the alliance between big monopoly capital and the large landowners, but to the clear advantage of the former and to the detriment of the rural masses.*⁵⁰

The analysis is sophisticated. It is not simply a case of fascism supporting the big money interests. Rather, Poulantzas is able to show us that these two fractions of the dominant class are both brought within the sphere of the State's influence, but that one fraction predominates in the end. At the same time, he tells us the rural masses are ignored. And, in the following pages, he outlines how the various elements of the owning class were engaged in a struggle one with another.⁵¹ Small business tried to ally themselves with working class interests to avoid being overwhelmed by the large corporations. And within the 'large capital' group there were struggles between industry and banking. Industries tried to form their own banks but they were not successful.⁵² After 1929, in the crisis of the Depression, the pre-fascist State tended to support the big banks. In the end, the economic crisis of 1929-1932 had the effect of further concentrating wealth, though not without considerable struggle and resistance from medium capital interests.⁵³

With the rise of fascism, these contradictions were diminished :

... this neutralization was the result of *an economic policy favourable to big monopoly capital (i.e. to finance capital), favourable therefore to the establishment in the German social formation of the dominance of monopoly capital.*⁵⁴

Again, the fascist State did not simply side with large businesses against their smaller counterparts. The economy gained strength with Hitler, and, to some extent, all boats rose together.⁵⁵ The real losers were working people. And indeed, given the needs of the emerging war State, with a massive and increasing demand for heavy industry, the slow, logical movement of monopoly capital towards the war economy was inevitable. But this did not mean that the State ignored smaller businesses.⁵⁶ Again, Poulantzas is reminding us that no simple obliteration of one class fraction by another will suffice as an adequate analysis of the historical facts. Poulantzas argued that the State *regulated* the economy, which allowed these class contradictions to endure, but to be managed.⁵⁷

competition. This is the rise of an advanced Monopoly Capital, in which wealth and political power concentrated in the hands of the few, isolated from economic competition by their dominance in the particular market that they occupy.

⁴⁷ FD, 89.

⁴⁸ FD, 90-91

⁴⁹ FD, 91.

⁵⁰ FD, 92. The italics appear in the original.

⁵¹ FD, 93ff.

⁵² FD, 94.

⁵³ FD, 95.

⁵⁴ FD, 95. Italics in the original.

⁵⁵ FD, 96.

⁵⁶ FD, 96.

⁵⁷ FD, 97.

A familiar pattern of argumentation is now beginning to assert itself. Poulantzas wants to claim that the State, and even the ‘exceptional’ fascist State, engages in the absorption of class struggles within its apparatus. It does not seek to end or eviscerate class conflicts and class struggles. Instead it attempts to manage them. This argument is repeated widely in Poulantzas’s work, as we shall discover further into this discussion. The complexity of this argument, allowing for the various strands and elements of class struggle to be assessed and evaluated, contrasts rather sharply with the Third International’s approach.⁵⁸ While the Comintern suggested that monopoly capital was the ‘death agony of ‘decaying’ capitalism’, Poulantzas wants instead to argue that fascism pushes capitalism forward dramatically :

... fascism really represents a development of *capitalist forces of production*, that is within the limits of *imperialist social relations*. It represented industrial development, technological innovation, and an increase in the productivity of labour – but all the while ... reinforcing class exploitation and domination.⁵⁹

Poulantzas then turns his attention to the political and ideological elements, expanding his analysis of class relations well beyond the economic and into the spheres of the superstructure.⁶⁰ Things were falling apart in Germany on a hegemonic level in the 1920’s. While large capital was developing, these fractions of the ruling class were not carrying the nation with them ideologically ; they did have hold of the national common sense.⁶¹ The left gained power in 1928, but were hit immediately by the economic crisis of 1929, and no-one could put together a policy that was widely accepted :

... *no element was able to gain hegemony*. Internal political struggles within the power bloc became so sharp that no element in it succeeded, even for a short period, in imposing a policy which represented both its specific interests and the general political interests of the bloc.⁶²

In *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci had earlier argued that the political sphere falls apart when political parties no longer manage to represent their constituents adequately.⁶³ In the period just before Hitler’s rise to power, this was especially true of the landowners and large capital in Germany.⁶⁴ Some elements of the landowning class favoured military dictatorship ; at the same time, para-military organizations started to form. Given the break between constituents and parties, the parliamentary system became redundant.⁶⁵ Employers’ associations now started to become very powerful. Some thought they could use the Nazi party to further their own aims.

At the same time, an ideological crisis had developed that paralleled the political crisis. Bismarck had managed to create a ‘revolution from above’⁶⁶, but this had been under the tutelage of the

⁵⁸ The thinking of Soviet theorists, and especially those voices heard in the various congresses of the Third International are continually echoing in Poulantzas’s mind as he writes these pages. He takes plenty of time to contrast his own view with that of orthodox Soviet thinking, being especially critical of the ‘economism’ and false thinking of this tendency. (FD, 97-99)

⁵⁹ FD, 98.

⁶⁰ FD, 100-108.

⁶¹ FD, 100.

⁶² FD, 101.

⁶³ PN, Pages 30-31.

⁶⁴ FD, 102.

⁶⁵ FD, 102.

⁶⁶ FD, 103.

landowning class. The new industrial bourgeoisie had not been able to develop an ideology of their own :

'Liberalism', an important aspect of bourgeois ideology in the process of laying the foundations of European capitalism, never succeeded in taking root in Germany. The dominant ideology until the end of the First World War was in fact feudal ideology, but feudal ideology *transformed* to embrace the bourgeoisie's own interests : militarism , the cult of State despotism etc., ... none of the broad, liberal nationalist movements of other European countries could be found in Germany before the war. German nationalism took direct military expression : it was dominated at that step by feudal ideology.⁶⁷

It was then a logical step to move from feudal ideology to the ideology of big capital directly without the need to attend to the ideas of the middle classes – no period of competitive capitalism was required. At this point, Poulantzas calls upon Althusser's notion of the 'ideological State apparatus' a familiar element of the Althusserian theoretical armature, which refers to those institutional parts of the State that develop and support the cultural structure of society, viewed in the broadest sense. But he has little to say about the State itself at this point. Instead he notes the rise of a variety of romantic nationalist movements harking back to the ideas of the Weimar republic, the significance of the universities, the extension of the media, the rise of the cinema and the radio as elements of the developing ideological structure, and the emergence of 'various 'intellectual circles, clubs, groups, etc.'⁶⁸ These ideological movements not only establish a bulwark against working class ideas, but they also try to provide a coherent ideology for the ruling class in a period of substantial turmoil. The parliamentary system came under increasing attack because of its failure to achieve any substantial goals. In this context :

It was fascism that was to reunite the power bloc, under the hegemony of big capital.⁶⁹

Thus fascism represented a dramatic step forward for capitalism, and especially the monopoly capitalist interests. Far from being the last stage of capitalism, it suggested a capitalism of the future. Perhaps this is why Poulantzas is fascinated by these old régimes when facing the new conditions of the 1970's. Perhaps, in that moment before the collapse of the dictatorships in Greece, Portugal and Spain, he thought that fascism might emerge again all over Europe. It was certainly experiencing a resurgence in Latin America. The 1920's had seen a series of steps taken by the ruling classes against workers and peasants. The momentary appearance of social democracy soon gave way to the interests of what Poulantzas now routinely calls 'big capital'.

How, finally, did the Nazi Party achieve power, and sustain its hegemony? The Party was crushed in 1923 after an attempted coup.⁷⁰ But it grew rapidly again, so that by 1927 it had 72,000 members, 108,000 in 1928 and 178,000 in 1929.⁷¹ At the same time, close connections were being built between large capital and the Party. Some of the old elements of the landowning classes also came to be involved. At the same time, the Nazi Party sought to maintain close ties with working people. The Party was playing both sides of the game. Nonetheless when the Party came to power, it was clearly in close alliance with the largest capitalist interests :

With the coming to power of national socialism, the political hegemony of big capital was secured, the dislocation between political hegemony and economic domination was resolved, and the growth of its economic domination accelerated. In this process, advancing by steps and with not a few diversions,

⁶⁷ *FD*, 103-104.

⁶⁸ *FD*, 105.

⁶⁹ *FD*, 107.

⁷⁰ *FD*, 109.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

big capital used the fascist party, the fascist State and fascist ideology to successfully impose a general policy which unified the power bloc under its aegis, overcoming politically the economic contradictions rife within it.⁷²

In its wake, traditional political parties were swept away, and major elements of the left-wing, anti-capitalist elements of the Nazi party were purged. Close ties were made with the petty bourgeoisie, who provided the needed officials for a rapidly expanding State. But this was only a mechanism for establishing the State. It was soon clear that those in charge came from the ranks of big capital, even though the Nazi Party established a relatively autonomous State quite capable of taking independent action if required. The petty bourgeoisie still played a part in the State, and the Nazi Party continued to struggle to secure the various elements of the class structure into a coherent whole.⁷³

In Italy, fascism developed earlier than in Germany, but it also developed more slowly. Agriculture was archaic, and industry was only partly formed. During the establishment of the fascist régime, there was widespread land speculation and a surge in industrial development. The two fractions of the ruling bloc were moving in different directions.⁷⁴ There was some difficulty, therefore, in bringing the two fractions together. Large and medium capital were also at odds. Medium capital, concerned with consumer goods, were at loggerheads with heavy industry.⁷⁵ Alliances formed between landowners and medium capital against large capital interests. In addition, banking and industrial capital were at odds.⁷⁶ This is a familiar pattern of exposition. Poulantzas sees the Italian political landscape riven with class divisions, and we anticipate that the emerging fascist State will be faced with the problem of amalgamation, as we have seen outlined in the German case.

In the Italian case, industry was less well-developed than in Germany. There were attempts by industry to buy the banks, possible because of huge war profits.⁷⁷ With the arrival of fascism, industrial monopoly capital finally succeeded in gaining a dominant position. And, again in contrast to Germany, the State intervened to strengthen 'big capital' against landed interests.⁷⁸ Similarly, fascism supported big capital against medium capital interests.⁷⁹

The relationship between landowners and big capital attracts special consideration.⁸⁰ From the Marxist position these two class categories represent two modes of production, two ways of doing economic business. The rise of large capital means both that agriculture becomes a more fully capitalist enterprise, but also that the old way of life dissolves. Feudalism disappears, and the old relationships between owner and worker in the country disappear.⁸¹

⁷² FD, 111.

⁷³ FD, 111-113.

⁷⁴ FD, 114-115.

⁷⁵ FD, 115.

⁷⁶ FD, 116.

⁷⁷ FD, 116.

⁷⁸ FD, 117.

⁷⁹ Poulantzas uses the term 'medium capital' in much of this discussion, and it is not entirely clear what he means. It seems likely he wants to distinguish between large-scale banking, finance and industry and smaller-scale enterprise, and, at the other end, from owner-run businesses, the self-employed petty bourgeoisie. He provides no further clarification.

⁸⁰ FD, 118-123.

⁸¹ This is not to suggest some utopian paradise in which the rural sector dissolves into an elysian landscape – far from it. But from a legal standpoint, the old structures of serfdom are removed.

Capitalist agriculture proved far more productive than feudalism. At the same time, however, industrial capital grew at a much faster rate than rural capital.⁸²

Following his pattern of exposition established in the German case study, Poulantzas now turns to political and ideological issues. In Italy, the emerging bourgeoisie had been able to provide leadership in the social democratic moment. In these conditions medium capital was able to thrive. But from 1920, big capital started to work towards hegemonic domination, and this new impetus led to hegemonic instability.⁸³ The new offensive was a failure. Rural interests and medium capital were never drawn under this new ideological umbrella. Poulantzas points out that the Catholic Church, through the agency of the Popular Party, represented rural interests during this period.⁸⁴ Again, the moment was reached in which no-one was able to establish a lasting hegemony, and into this gap Mussolini and the fascist party were able to move forward. However, the struggle was long and hard. Medium capital held sway in parliament. Political parties still represented important interests well into the 1920's. But soon the entire parliamentary and party system was being superseded by other interests :

From 1920, the economic cooperative bodies (Confederation of Industry, Confederation of Agriculture) played an increasing part, by-passing the role of the political parties ; para-military organizations were formed as nuclei of class organizations ... Big capital aimed for a coup d'état and a solution through *military dictatorship* ... the political role of the army was growing ...⁸⁵

Initially, some liberal interests aligned with the emerging fascists. At the same time, the ideological struggle was taking place. Capitalism had come to fruition in Italy under bourgeois management, unlike Germany. But this ideology experienced a substantial crisis at the end of World War One.⁸⁶ The old bourgeois system of ideas no longer met the requirements of big business. Italian fascism was able to attach itself to this new movement. While the emerging hegemony of fascism developed, it was resisted, as might have been anticipated, by medium capital and by landowners. Working class interests were also clearly being overlooked.

In the ideological apparatuses, the struggle was especially sharp. In the universities and in the Church, these struggles were powerfully felt. Thus, Poulantzas concludes :

... the rise of fascism represents a step of *offensive strategy* on the part of the power bloc, and, in particular, of big capital.⁸⁷

For all the differences between the German and the Italian cases, Poulantzas is able to show, in both instances, that fascism constitutes a revolutionary move forward for monopoly capital interests. It is not the last gasp of capitalism, but rather a surge forward, not least because of the sophisticated way in which complex class struggles, both within and between classes, are held together within the structure of the State, and because of the huge technological and industrial strides that were made under these new régimes. Poulantzas's notion of the power bloc, his use of hegemony to extend his

⁸² Poulantzas breaks off here to attack his enduring enemies at the Comintern, showing how faulty their reasoning was on this question, adding to the list of their errors. See pages 120-123.

⁸³ *FD*, 124.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *FD*, 126.

⁸⁶ *FD*, 128ff.

⁸⁷ *FD*, 130.

analysis from the economic to the political and ideological, and his detailed historical analysis together constitute a significant advance in the analysis of the rise of fascism.

Poulantzas now summarizes his argument. Can we now see how the fascist party connected itself to the power bloc? In Italy, big capital were slow to support emerging fascist groups. Rural fascism developed early, and Mussolini very soon developed alliances with medium capital and with the socialists.⁸⁸ This led to clashes with rural elements in the party, and, very soon, as the party moved in a rightist direct, to a breaking with the left tendencies. Poulantzas argues that Mussolini was then able to neutralize medium capital by taking a liberal turn – indeed Mussolini seems to be turning left and right, twisting this way and that simply to hold the party together.⁸⁹ In any event in 1921 he comments :

The State must be limited to its purely juridical and political functions. Let the State give us police to protect decent people from villains, a well-organized system of justice, an army ready for any eventuality, and a foreign policy to serve the national interest. All the rest, and I do not even exclude the secondary schools, must return to individual private initiative. If you want to save the State, you must abolish the collectivist State handed down by the force of events and by the war ...⁹⁰

It is a very curious statement to make if he did not make it merely out of the necessity to compromise and embrace many categories in the broader fascist project, because this period immediately precedes an unprecedented extension of State activities in the service of large capital interests. Very soon, by, 1922, the Vatican declared support for the new régime. As the State developed further , big capital was able to secure its interests in a convincing way. Medium capital were brought into the fold to keep the peace. And by 1925, all political parties were dissolved into the State.⁹¹ Mussolini had, until this time, been able to keep close ties with working class movement. Between 1923 and 1925, these elements of the party were purged from its ranks, sometimes in pitched battles. And any other elements of resistance were cleared from the ranks of the army and the broader State apparatus.

In Germany the petty bourgeoisie provided the personnel for the State, and acted as a ruling class, while Italian fascism initially used the bourgeois class, only later turning to the petty bourgeoisie.⁹² In the final stages of the development of the fascist State, big capital interests took over the dominant positions in State institutions, both in Italy and in Germany. Using the petty bourgeoisie in each case allowed the State to develop relative autonomy from big capital.⁹³ Again, as we have seen before, the Poulantzian vision is of the State wrestling and controlling the class fractions and class conflicts of the past, while ensuring the emergence of an ever-stronger monopoly capital fraction into the future.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ *FD*, 132.

⁸⁹ *FD*, 133.

⁹⁰ Mussolini, quoted in *FD*, pages 132-133.

⁹¹ *FD*, 133

⁹² *FD*, 134.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *FD*, 135.

Fascism and the Working Class

Poulantzas now turns his attention to the working class. It is now clear in broad terms what is meant by the working class, the proletariat. These are the people formed by capitalism into a new class, a people who have merely their labour to sell.⁹⁵ They are the other side of the coin to the bourgeoisie, who require them to take part in the industrial process if profit is to be accrued. In industrial society, this group constituted a vast majority of the population, as people flooded into the cities to join the new economic system.

Poulantzas has already made mention of how working class interests were allied with the fascist State in the early years of its development, in both Italy and in Germany. Indeed, it is well to remember how closely allied both fascist parties were to working class social movements in the early stages of the development of the fascist parties. Now he fleshes out how this relationship developed in both countries more fully. He begins by taking aim at his old enemies in the Comintern, who in his view, have again misunderstood the situation again.⁹⁶ For Poulantzas, the situation is very clear – the rise of fascism constitutes a series of defeats for the working class. There was indeed a revolutionary moment that presented itself in the wake of World War One in each country, but in each country the left failed to take advantage of the situation.⁹⁷ Gramsci has already told us that in Italy, the left were long on rhetoric, but short on organization.⁹⁸ It is a *process* of defeat that Poulantzas is pointing out, not a single moment of destruction. This resulted from weak organization and poor strategy. Working class interests did survive the early years of fascism in each country, even when the State appeared to be moving decisively against them. But not only did the working class lose in the political and economic realms ; they were damaged also ideologically. The communist parties in both countries made a poor job of leading the mass of ordinary people.⁹⁹ This failure was connected with the failure of Marxist-Leninist doctrines to provide the ideological leadership required in the specific conditions faced in Italy and Germany. Instead, workers remained invested in the system as it stood. They supported traditional trade unions and reformist policies, believing that their best chance of amelioration still remained with the established institutions of society. Among small business and small farmers, the petty bourgeoisie, there were also strong anti-capitalist sentiments, including some interest in anarchy, a failure to believe in organizations, and a strong belief in violence to gain one's ends.¹⁰⁰ Of course, some of these ideological elements were not foreign to fascism, especially the resort to violence, and thus, in the early days, these sentiments were shared widely, both within the petty bourgeoisie and the fascist movement, as well as among workers. But much of this thinking had little to do with Marxism or the revolutionary movements taking place elsewhere, and especially in Russia. The strategies proposed were labelled 'ultra-left', too far left for orthodox thinking, so labelled because those who followed such a doctrine chose to go beyond the organizational umbrella of the party, and act on their own. The Comintern were willing to go so far as to label such activities as opening the door to fascism. If only these people had followed our direction, they would have avoided fascism after all, seemed to be the message.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ In the Marxist lexicon, the term 'labour power' is often used. This refers to the notion that people sell their capacity to work, their potential labour. In the end they sell their labour, but initially they offer their labour potential, their mental and physical resources.

⁹⁶ FD, 139.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gramsci, 37.

⁹⁹ FD, 144.

¹⁰⁰ FD, 145.

¹⁰¹ FD, 146-147.

There was also the problem of social democracy.¹⁰² In the early days, fascism incorporated elements of social democracy within its structure. Such a move promised a chance for working class interests to be represented within the structure of the emerging State.¹⁰³ Social democracy, Poulantzas argues, provides a way forward in which the bourgeoisie are able to sustain power, while providing concessions to the working class. It offers a moderate way forward. It does this, according to Poulantzas, through ideological means :

The bourgeoisie being unable to rule through organized physical repression alone, and ideology not existing only in ideas, *the bourgeois State has at its disposal in all circumstances one or more ideological state apparatuses specially designed to inculcate bourgeois ideology into the working class.*¹⁰⁴

The social democratic party represents the normal party of the capitalist State. It has within it political parties that represent working class interests, as well as those of the ruling classes, along with small business parties, and other group advocates. All in all, it offers a class compromise to each sector of society, even if, in the end, it remains under the tutelage of dominant class interests. For Lenin, such a party is a ‘workers party’ carrying out the *policy of the bourgeoisie*.¹⁰⁵ But this simply won’t do for Poulantzas. In contrast, he wants to argue that the bourgeoisie just can’t use such a structure to get what they want, and thus their power is deeply compromised. Instead, fascism, the ‘exceptional State’, offers a far clearer victory for the ruling class, and thus the two forms of régime must be clearly separated. In the end, social democracy must be destroyed if fascism, and the dominant hegemonic power bloc, is to succeed. Social democracy offers the hope of a better world for working people. For Poulantzas, this is a false hope and a way of stemming genuine change. In this long discussion about social democracy and social fascism, it is remarkable how often the discussion moves back to Gramsci’s argument that the crisis is pushed forward whenever parties lose their connections to those they represent.¹⁰⁶ The position is simple in the end, however. Social democracy cannot provide the conditions that the ruling classes require for the furtherance of their interests, and the fascist solution is followed.

Given this background, one can foreshadow what Poulantzas might have to say about the Communist parties in Italy and Germany, and their role in all this. In Italy the party first followed a united front strategy, trying to bring all the left elements together under a single umbrella. But the strategy fell apart, both in Italy and in Germany because of disputes about who was acceptable and who was not within the new political structure. The left seemed to enjoy fighting among themselves more than fighting the ruling class. Indeed, instead of fighting fascism, the strategy seemed to be to fight social democracy first, with disastrous consequences for the solidarity of the movement.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² By social democracy is meant a society committed to equality and social justice through non-revolutionary means. This strategy of government involves strong government intervention to regulate the excesses of capital in order to ensure a basic level of welfare support for the less well advantaged. Some commentators, Bob Jessop, for example, have called it ‘the best possible shell’ for capitalism, allowing the State to smooth off the rough edges of the capitalist system while allowing the ruling class to get on with business as usual. Poulantzas calls this the ‘normal’ state of capitalism, and refers routinely to fascism as the ‘exceptional’ State.

¹⁰³ Poulantzas now heads off into a long critique of Comintern policy on social democracy. Lenin famously said ‘Social-Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism’, (FD, 148. cited from *Works*, volume 6, Moscow, 1952-1955, page 294) as if to suggest they are all one and the same thing. Poulantzas goes to great length to show the errors in such thinking. See pages 148-151.

¹⁰⁴ FD, 151. Italics in the original.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ FD, 154.

¹⁰⁷ FD, 161.

How did the working class actually fare under fascism? The political violence of the fascist movement is taken for granted. In the early stages in the ideological sphere there were elements of working class ideology that still remained, but as the State developed, these ideas became embedded into the corporatist-syndicalism that Gramsci had already carefully outlined in the Italian case. This new ideology included old elements of feudalism, nostalgia for a past that never existed, a commitment to a negotiated agreement between capital and labour, and arguments that suggested a level of control over the workplace that might be ceded to the workers themselves.¹⁰⁸ Thus Poulantzas concludes that while the working class were never completely crushed by fascism, the joint effects of physical violence, the reshaping of the ideological apparatus, and the reduction of unemployment all had a significant role in limiting the possibilities for any realistic political alternatives.¹⁰⁹

Poulantzas now sets out the history of this process in *Germany*.¹¹⁰ It starts with the attempted leftist coup in 1918-19 ; then the Kapp Putsch of 1920, a right-wing attempt to wrestle control of the government from the leftist Weimar Republic ; the rising of the Ruhr workers, a brief leftist insurrection that momentarily gave control to workers in several cities, and which was cruelly crushed by the right ; a series of uprisings by the German Communist party, the KPD, in Prussia. In 1923, the KPD formed alliances with the government, and established workers' councils. This was a form of capitulation. The Weimar Republic had established some concrete gains for workers :

The Weimar Constitution ... was based on the extension of universal suffrage to both sexes, and on direct and proportional election. This made room for the presence of small parties in parliament, and the direct expression of the masses there. The eight-hour day was introduced ; collective bargaining was instituted, and unemployment insurance was set up. Factory committees ... could ... inspect the books of the factory and participate in trade-union development. Agricultural workers obtained the right of association and flocked into the unions *en masse*.¹¹¹

These advances were later undermined by fascism but not entirely 'wiped out'.¹¹² The Weimar Republic, established in a universe where 75% of the population were working people, had to be seen to be making concessions to the working class. It would not have survived without such a strategy. But as fascism started its rise, these working class institutions were gradually reduced in size and importance. Exhaustion had set in, and declines in union membership were soon seen.¹¹³

At the same time, the German Communist Party, the KPD, had become cut off from the majority of working people. Once a truly mass party, by the end of the 1920's, it had become a shadow of its former self. Initially, because it took the parliamentary road, it gained electoral support. In May 1924, it secured 12.6% of the electorate, and by November 1932, 16.9%. However, at the same time, membership in the party had reduced dramatically, and it had followed a social democratic path, giving up many of its traditional beliefs. Calls for a general strike within the party membership fell on deaf ears on several occasions.¹¹⁴ There were strong divisions within the party.

¹⁰⁸ *FD*, 165-166.

¹⁰⁹ *FD*, 167.

¹¹⁰ *FD*, 169-197.

¹¹¹ *FD*, 171-172.

¹¹² Poulantzas's phrase, *FD*, 172.

¹¹³ *FD*, 173.

¹¹⁴ *FD*, 175.

The social democratic trend within the working class had become dominant, both within the KPD, and beyond it, among socialists in general. German fascism in its early incarnation had some elements of this ideology within its structure. Indeed, Nazism promised trade union representation. The Nazi Party also encouraged direct action, both in the shape of general strikes, and in the sense of forming action squads to meet certain specific goals.¹¹⁵ Corporatism and syndicalism, characteristics of Italian fascism in its mature stage, were also elements of Nazi ideology. This model of unions and employers structured within the arms of the State was widely propagated. Trade unions were anticipated to have a substantial role in the evolving State to keep an eye on overly-greedy employers.

Social democracy held powerful sway over a large number of workers, with the Social Democratic Party, the SPD, holding over 20% of the vote for many years, and experiencing an increase in membership. The social democratic story in Germany can be seen as a long history of compromise with the established order.¹¹⁶ The social democrats had an armed militia, but they did not use it. Even after Hitler's rise to power, they sought compromise with the new authorities.

By contrast, the German Communist Party (KPD) have been characterised as 'ultra-left' during this period.¹¹⁷ But, in Poulantzas's view, this was a mistaken analysis. While the communist still favoured a direct attack on the State, they rarely acted in this way. Some have argued that the KPD recruited only from the lower strata of the working class, and among the unemployed, but this appears to be a false position. In fact, many of the membership were employed, and as many as 40% were skilled workers.¹¹⁸ They did not collaborate with the social democrats, claiming that 'the revolution was imminent',¹¹⁹ and that the social democrats were in bed with the established order. But the KPD never set up alternative structures to promote a direct assault on the state. On the contrary, they depended on trade union structures to promote their cause, hardly a revolutionary strategy. Thus the communists came to be revisionist in practice, and hardly further to the left than the social democrats in many respects, whatever their revolutionary rhetoric might say.¹²⁰

The KPD believed that, as a result of an inevitable economic crisis, that a revolution was on the cards, and they sat back and waited for the crisis to happen. Of course, a contrary view would be that the party ought to work towards this goal :

Work for it? Rather they would *wait* for it, until the moment of insurrection arrive *punctually* on the 'great day'.¹²¹

The KPD continued throughout the 1920's to believe that electoral success was inexorable, and that the real enemy was social democracy, and not Nazism.¹²² It is somewhat striking to realize the extraordinary animosity that existed towards social democrats, who one might imagine would be natural allies in the struggle for progress, but it stems, very clearly, from the KPD's deep attachment to the 'revolution or nothing' position of ultra-leftism. And the KPD did nothing in the countryside

¹¹⁵ FD, 177.

¹¹⁶ FD, 179.

¹¹⁷ FD, 180.

¹¹⁸ FD, 181.

¹¹⁹ FD, 182.

¹²⁰ FD, 182-183.

¹²¹ FD, 184. Italics in the original.

¹²² FD, 184.

among peasants and small farmers, who readily sided with fascism. Like the social democrats, the communists also had an armed militia, but apart from a few skirmishes, they also failed to engage the Nazis in sustained battles. It is hard to disagree with Poulantzas when he claims that the revolutionary fervour of the communists was little more than dilettantism.¹²³

With Hitler's accession to power, the KPD seemed to have acquiesced at every moment, failing to take any direct action of any kind. No-one in the communist movement outside Germany could believe what had happened. Poulantzas reminds us that they were the communist party most closely aligned with Moscow,¹²⁴ but there were clear indications that 'following the line' of direct confrontation with the State was consistently resisted. Communists did fight heroically in the resistance against Nazism after they came to power, but it was mostly a case of too little, too late.

The final part of the story is to assess what happened within the Nazi State to the working class.¹²⁵ Were the promises of strong trade unions carried out? Were employers constrained in their demands? Before their rise to power, the Nazis had campaigned hard in the factories to secure support from the industrial working class. They were most successful among highly-paid workers and the best educated. They were less successful among the rank and file,¹²⁶ though they did best among the peasantry recently recruited into factory work and among the unemployed. Unemployment was a massive problem in 1932, with 5,500,000 out of work,¹²⁷ and one might imagine this was fertile territory for the Nazis. But, Poulantzas argues, the majority of the working class stayed loyal to the social democrats and the communists. So what was going on, exactly? Poulantzas poses the question in this way :

... the thing to be explained is the *neutralization* and *passivity* of the working class which national socialism affected.

The *ideological* aspect of national socialism is fundamental here. Firstly, this ideology had a strong 'anti-capitalist' side, a typical sign of the petty bourgeoisie in revolt. In the generalised ideological crisis of the rise of fascism, this petty-bourgeois anti-capitalist aspect ... was extended to the working class. *But that was not all* : national socialism, under the inspiration of its 'left' wing led by the Strasser brothers, took up some really socialist-sounding slogans.¹²⁸

Indeed, Poulantzas reminds us that in the early 1920s, the national socialists had proposed the nationalization of private industry, not to secure it for the working class, but to ensure that all of society would benefit.¹²⁹ Corporatism and co-management was also widely discussed within Nazi party circles.

When the party came to power, they were able to deal systematically with the massive problem of unemployment. While there had been 5,500,000 unemployed in 1932, by the time World War Two was declared, the problem had disappeared entirely.¹³⁰ Wages did not fall in real terms under

¹²³ See footnote 36, *FD*, page 186.

¹²⁴ *FD*, 187.

¹²⁵ *FD*, 188-197.

¹²⁶ *FD*, 188-189.

¹²⁷ *FD*, 189.

¹²⁸ *FD*, 190.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* There were many attacks made on international capitalism in particular, and one can see here, perhaps all too clearly, that an attack on Jewish interests was not far away.

¹³⁰ Of course, similar trends were seen elsewhere, particularly in the United States under the New Deal. But there are differences in the rates of the decline which are very important. In Britain, where speculation in the market had been limited, the crisis was somewhat less dramatic than in the U.S. and Germany, but it took many years for the economy to

national socialism. At the heart of the national socialist strategy was a wage hierarchy that had the political effect of dividing the working class. The predominant argument was that exceptional productivity should be rewarded.¹³¹ In Poulantzas's view, the Nazi régime attacked the working class in several ways, not merely by establishing a wage hierarchy :

... it was not only or even mainly through its economic policy that national socialism could neutralize the working class. It also did so by police terror, and especially by the total reorganization of the ideological state apparatuses ... this neutralization proceeded by steps.¹³²

A period of compromise was followed by the dissolution of the old trade unions, and their replacement by new ones of the régime's devising. There was also an attempt to get rid of employer organizations, and to bring them also into the new structure of the State. But in the end, employers remained independent. Thus the attempt by the Nazis to follow a syndicalist strategy that would embrace capital and labour failed, and the private sector were able to maintain a large degree of autonomy, not unlike the situation in Italy.

The purpose of the newly-formed unions was not merely to control workers, but to win over their hearts and minds – it was an ideological initiative. Fascism, it appears, could not survive without forming a new ideology for the working class through a new 'Labour Front' which they had formed.¹³³ At the same time, even though the 'Labour Front' was a fascist organization through and through, it was always mistrusted by the State, and by the private employers, who had successfully managed to maintain their separation from the State's attempts to co-opt them into the new structures.

Poulantzas then turn his attention to the *Italian* situation. We can already see the nature of his analysis quite clearly. He is extending his class analysis beyond that of the Comintern in two ways. First, his attention to detail in assessing the various classes and fractions of classes is very elaborate and sophisticated. Not only is it surprising in its close attention to the various elements of the class structure, and to the fragmentary nature of various classes, but this approach is accompanied also by a detailed historical account of the period in question. We see classes rise and fall. Second, he is at pains to extend class analysis well beyond economism, beyond the limits often set by the Soviet line, in which, first and last, it is the economic dimension that attracts all the theoretical and political attention. With Poulantzas, this limitation is overcome with the extension of economic analysis into the realms of political and ideological activity. This he does quite explicitly by assigning specific sections of the text to each topic. As we approach his coverage of Italy and the working class, we will anticipate that this theoretical approach will be repeated.

He begins by reminding us of the post-war situation in Italy. As with Germany, economic crisis laid the foundation for any possible uprising. In Italy, this took the form of strikes, rather than a general

recover. Unemployment peaked in 1932 at 3,500,000. By 1937, the number had fallen to 1,500,000. In the United States, unemployment peaked at 12,830,000 in 1933, but it took many years for the rate to fall. The rate of unemployment was 24.75% in 1933, and was still at 17.05% in 1939. But by 1941, when the U.S. entered the war, it had dropped below 10%. But it was not the war that solved the problem, as many conservative commentators have proposed. In fact, much of the problem had been ameliorated before the war started. The war certainly claimed all the remaining available labour, but much of the change in the rate of unemployment had happened before the United States entered the war economy.

¹³¹ *FD*, 193.

¹³² *FD*, 194.

¹³³ *FD*, 196.

insurrection.¹³⁴ In 1919 and 1920, there appeared a series of worker-soldier alliances (soviets) and these new structures gained some brief authority, but they had no staying power and quickly dissolved. 1920 saw a further rise in strike activity, and a general strike resulted in the temporary establishment of workers' councils in many factories. The new councils made sure wages were paid, and production continued, this time under a new form of management.¹³⁵ Again, while this may have been a 'revolutionary moment', the moment passed, and did not extend from the factories to society in general. By the start of 1921, the workers' movement had faltered, and one could see elements of the fascist movement on the rise.¹³⁶ But progress had nonetheless been made :

... the working class had won some important political and economic gains in the process : substantial wage increases ; an eight-hour day ; the generalization of collective bargaining ; factory committees ; direct universal suffrage ; and relative autonomy in the management of community affairs in red areas. These gains were constantly undermined during the rise of fascism, but the representatives of medium capital allowed them to persist to an extent unacceptable to big capital up to the time fascism came to power.¹³⁷

Nonetheless, the revolutionary moment had past, the strike rate subsided, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had failed to make close alliances with the majority of workers. As in the German situation, the party was split, some, including Gramsci, seeking an alliance with the socialist party, others preferring anything but this alliance, paralleling the bitter struggles in Germany between the social democrats and the communists. This 'splittism' is a pattern that has hounded the left for many years, such that the bitterness between various left fractions, the name-calling, the insults and the abuse, has often captured more energy than any enmity that might be directed towards the enemy, fascism in this case. It was quite clearly the situation in Germany, and now the Italian case presents a similar picture.

Poulantzas now turns quite self-consciously to the separate matters of politics and ideology. It is the 'rebel petty bourgeoisie'¹³⁸ that captures the ideological attention here in the character of revolutionary syndicalism. This ideology, Poulantzas explains, amounts to a 'self-emancipation' of producers through the trade unions. The revolution must lie in the area of production, and this will diminish the competition between workers, which damages wage rates. It was argued that the State would be replaced by unions when the time was right. The State would collapse under its own weight, and producers in the factories would take over. This change would be associated with a great leap forward in the technology being used in the factories, and thus the leadership of the new administration would likely rest in the hands of the most technologically skilled.

Poulantzas then discusses Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*,¹³⁹ and argues that many of these ideas came from this source. Sorel believed that violence was necessary to unmask the enemy, and because the working class movement needs to be motivated into action. Poulantzas reminds us that Mussolini was an early follower of Sorel.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, many who had followed Sorel joined the early fascist party in 1919. Thus, it was the petty bourgeoisie that greatly influenced the ideology of the working class. Violence was at the centre of this ideology, a violence that would set the workers aflame, that would

¹³⁴ FD, 198.

¹³⁵ FD, 198-199.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ FD, 199.

¹³⁸ FD, 200.

¹³⁹ G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, Glencoe, 1950, pages 90-91.

¹⁴⁰ FD, 203.

bring the necessary fire-power to the struggle. Doing, rather than thinking, was the Mussolini dictum¹⁴¹, and the Sorelian line fitted this doctrine to a tee. Mussolini commented in 1920 :

Down with the State in every shape or form, the State of yesterday, today, tomorrow ... We have nothing left but the religion of anarchy.¹⁴²

It can have escaped no-one that within but a few years, Mussolini had changed his mind completely, and was proclaiming to everyone who would listen that the State was everything, that nothing existed beyond the State, and that the individual must be subservient to the State. This was a long way from anarchy. Mussolini also took what appeared to be a very pro-worker stance on workers' councils. In discussing the Dalmine¹⁴³ national strikers, he commented :

The formation of workers' councils, which for three days managed the firm ensuring the working of all branches and sections, represents an honest, well-intentioned attempt, and a worthy ambition, to succeed the so-called bourgeois class in the management of labour.¹⁴⁴

Fascism incorporated revolutionary syndicalism into its ideology, with the caveat that production must improve. Like the Taylorists of Henry Ford's world, increasing production through new labour relations and new technology, was central to the new plans.¹⁴⁵

How did social democracy and the communist party operate under the rise of Mussolini? The *social democrats*, organized under the umbrella of the Italian Socialist Party (the PSI), had a large number of industrial workers among their membership, and were able to gather in some agricultural workers as well.¹⁴⁶ They opposed involvement with the First World War. After the war, the party turned left towards the Comintern and the Third International. They reduced their political argument to economism, the reduction of sources of the revolution to the economic dimension. This 'Maximalist' trend suggested 'the imminence of revolution', and it forms a kind of positivism,¹⁴⁷ a way in which history is reduced to 'Iron Laws' of economic necessity. It was as if history had taken over, and the revolution was now inevitable. This moment occurred, of course, in the shadow of the Russian revolution, which made everything seem possible, and following the Maximalist line, almost unavoidable. There were those that thought nothing needed to be done – history would do it all by itself. But this position meant, quite logically, that there was no need for political strategy. All the left had to do was stand aside and let it happen. Given the position of the social democrats, happily ensconced in parliament, with a number of seats more or less guaranteed, this was socialism from the sofa, the comfortable path to a cosy revolution.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Quoted in *FD*, page 203.

¹⁴³ Dalmine is a commune 25 miles northeast of Milan in the Province of Bergamo, where workers took over factories, and for the first time, showed that workers could successfully run a factory system, and produce goods efficiently, and for the benefit of workers.

¹⁴⁴ *FD*, 204.

¹⁴⁵ *FD*, 204.

¹⁴⁶ *FD*, 204-209.

¹⁴⁷ In simple terms, the belief that social behavior can be reduced to natural scientific laws, so that history might be explained by some straightforward, rational logic, or by a set of laws, just as the behavior of gases, for example, can be explained by Boyle's Law.

¹⁴⁸ *FD*, 204-205.

This strategy, or more properly a non-strategy, led to an unwillingness to confront the State through strikes and overt struggles, steps, it was claimed, that would slow down the inevitable revolution. But there were more conservative elements in the social democratic party that did not hew to this 'inevabilist' line. They went instead in the direction of collaboration with the government, and hoped to be a part of it. Rather than stand aside and wait, they jumped in, boots and all, and participated. In this view, the State could still be seen as a neutral actor, thus allowing participation, and securing concessions for workers from the developing State apparatus.¹⁴⁹

The social democrats still believed that they had a secret weapon they could call on if needed in the last resort. This was the strategy of the general strike.¹⁵⁰ If all else failed, they argued, this weapon could be brought to bear to resist fascism. But the problem was that they were not organized – they had become passive, and were unable, at a moment's notice, to activate the working class movement into a general show of strength. At the same time, the fascists, already a movement of some size, and with the support of elements of the State, and some of the owners, had transportation and communications.¹⁵¹ The attempt at a general strike took place in August, 1922.¹⁵² It failed spectacularly and the fascists were able to use the attempt to take over a large number of facilities and factories. But well into the fascist régime, the social democrats still sought parliamentary seats until, in the end, parliament itself was dissolved.

On the *communist* side, the Italian Communist party (the PCI) took a different tack. Under the influence of the 'Bordiga Line'¹⁵³ the communists stayed away from orthodox politics, and fought vehemently against the social democratic left. As the social democrats faced failures, the PCI celebrated, seeing itself as the last-remaining vanguard party for the working class :

It even reached the point of congratulating itself on the success of fascism, in so far as this would weaken the influence of social democracy on the masses, and create favourable conditions for the extension of its own influence. This policy towards the Socialist Party was strongly criticised even before 1922 by Lenin, who advised making agreements with (the) Maximalists.¹⁵⁴

Not unlike the social democrats, the PCI underestimated the power of the fascists, but rather like the social democratic left wing, they assumed the revolution was imminent. Gramsci alone saw that the fascists could stage a coup d'état.¹⁵⁵

The PCI assumed that the fascists and the social democrats were in cahoots, and constituted a common enemy – any evidence to the contrary was clearly illusory, according to this view. And as for working with the social democrats, this should be done only in the economic sphere with the trade unions. There should be no political alliance. What they wanted was a small party of deeply committed communists. This would be enough to assure the success of the revolution. The Third

¹⁴⁹ FD, 207.

¹⁵⁰ FD, 208.

¹⁵¹ FD, 208.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Amodeo Bordiga was an Italian communist leader who opposed representative democracy, arguing that it was merely collaboration with the despised bourgeoisie. He proposed the abstentionist path going forward, arguing that the left should abstain from developing electoral support and gaining seats. Instead he worked towards the insurrectionist moment, aiming for an uprising about the working class to bring about the rupture with the old, corrupt society. See <http://www.reocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3909/bordbuik.html>, recovered on October 7th, 2016.

¹⁵⁴ FD, 210.

¹⁵⁵ FD, 210.

Comintern congress opposed such a view. They resisted the formation of small, perfectly formed communist parties, and instead reaffirmed the mass nature of the communist movement. Instead, the PCI stuck to the small party model. The communists did fight directly with the fascist militia groups, and sometimes gained successes.¹⁵⁶ Gramsci was involved in a resistance to the Bordiga line. Gramsci supported the development of the workers' councils, and felt that they might have the capacity to replace the existing political structure. Here Poulantzas engages in a rare critique of Gramsci :

... there is little doubt that at that time, Gramsci was advocating using the workers' councils to give workers powers which *by the fact of their establishment*, would replace the bourgeois State, and *to some extent he misunderstood the problem of the State itself*. This comes out clearly in his description of the 'factory' as the *basic political centre* of capitalist society, simply because it was its basic economic unit.¹⁵⁷

With the benefit of hindsight, we might all readily understand Gramsci's 'error', if that is what it is. Certainly, at this moment, and well before his later reflections in *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci seems to be taking an 'economist' line, pinning all his hopes on the factories, when it is clear that much more is at stake, and more is to be managed than just the factories, if a successful revolution is to take place. This is a view that he was to change significantly with his later vision of the State as a series of defences of some complexity, and with his insistence on the need to win the hegemonic battle if revolution was to succeed. However, even in this error, Poulantzas sees much to be admired. He comments, for example, on the correct notion of an alliance between the working classes, the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. He also commends Gramsci for seeing the workers' councils as a preparatory mechanism from which a springboard can be established aimed towards the revolution. And the Gramscian analysis also had an important political dimension to it, so charges of economism are misplaced, in his view.¹⁵⁸

Poulantzas then turns to a section summarizing this relationship between fascism and the working class. Italian resistance to the rise of fascism was stronger, though there were many similarities between the two case studies. Italian workers resisted more strongly than German workers, and fascism took longer, and it was less successful, in trying to incorporate workers into the State in Italy compared to Germany. The early fascist unions in Italy could count on a large membership, but many of its members came from agriculture, white collar workers and educated professionals, rather than the core working class. The socialist unions had many more members among the industrial working class. More workers were enrolled in the Nazi unions.¹⁵⁹

Unemployment was much less acute in Italy than in Germany. Italian workers' salaries remained stable throughout the 1920s, though they suffered substantially in the 1930s. There was a weaker policy of public works in Italy compared to Germany, and thus the Italian State was less able to deal with the issue of unemployment. As conditions worsened in the 1930's, social legislation advanced

¹⁵⁶ FD, 213.

¹⁵⁷ FD, 213. Poulantzas is quoting Gramsci cited in *Ordine Nuovo*, 15 July 1921, page 79, in the article *Lo strumento del lavoro*. The italics are in the original.

¹⁵⁸ FD, 214. Poulantzas then charges off into one of his many tirades about the diverse errors of Comintern policy at this time. (See pages 215- 218) The Comintern continually tried to create either separate communist trade unions in various countries, or they attacked social democratic unions, and sought to divide them. They shifted their alliances, sometimes veering towards trade union unity, at other times aiming for separation. The 'separation of politics and economics' was the main error, in Poulantzas's view. (215)

¹⁵⁹ FD, 219.

in several directions.¹⁶⁰ Trade unionists were offered positions in the government initially, though by 1927, property had been confiscated, and the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (the CGL) had been disbanded. In the end, the policy of partial absorption of the union movement into the State, and the destruction of those elements that could not be reached, was never fully realized. As a social movement that began as anti-capitalist, opposed to large companies and hostile to bourgeois intentions, the relationship of fascism to workers was always ambiguous. Union hopes to curb employers through the agency of the State remained unfulfilled. Mussolini's hope to capture large, capitalist interests within the fascist political architecture also remained unfulfilled. Private businesses managed to flourish and extend their power over Italian society, and the workers struggled to survive. The fascist revolution remained fundamentally incomplete.

Fascism and the Petty Bourgeoisie

The Marxist lexicon is pretty clear about what is meant by the two fundamental classes that arise in the capitalist era. On the one hand, there comes into being the owners of the new industrial society, the bourgeoisie, small in number, politically dominant in most cases, and focused on extracting profit from the emerging system. On the other hand, there arises the mass of workers, the proletariat, who exist by selling their labour power to these owners, and who receive less reward from the system, which exploits their labour for the sake of profit. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels famously set this argument out in powerful terms :

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles ... Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes ... The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.¹⁶¹

What is less clear is what is meant by the third class, the petty bourgeoisie. Who, precisely are these 'small capitalists', who seem to play an important role in the rise of fascism, and whose ideology seems to be essential in the establishment of the new hegemony? Not only that, but it appears that, from the Gramscian perspective, that they contribute the majority of the new functionaries in the rising fascist State in Italy.

The term has been confusingly used as a substitute for the middle classes that emerged in the rising industrial society of the 19th. century, and these rising classes need to be analysed rather more

¹⁶⁰ FD, 221. Poulantzas comments : ... Italian fascism did seem to grant some concessions in 'social' legislation, which had previously been practically non-existent in Italy : insurance was established for industrial accidents, illness, old age, childbirth etc. (221) The citation is to P. Guichonnet, *Mussolini et le fascisme*, 1968, page 54.

¹⁶¹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>, pages 14-15. The manifesto has so many prefaces, so many additions, corrections and preliminaries that it is a surprise to get to the document itself. Once the preliminaries have been waded through, the language of the manifesto itself is vivid and breath-taking, the clarity and power of the argument unmistakable.

carefully.¹⁶² The most important ‘rising class’ is clearly the bourgeoisie themselves, who start to gain power vis-a-vis the established landed order, and gather financial and political power about them. The rise of the State itself, as well as the emergence of the professions, gives birth to a new category of administrators and well-educated workers. These people are also sometimes somewhat ambiguously housed in the middle class. Marxist approaches tend to see such people as highly educated elements of the working class, unless they work for themselves. If they work for themselves, they become members of the petty bourgeoisie, neither owners or workers. They neither exploit other people, nor are they exploited themselves.¹⁶³ In one sense they escape the clutches of capitalism entirely, though this is too facile a conclusion to draw in the end, however attractive it is at first glance. But, in summary, the technical definition of the petty bourgeoisie separates them from the proletariat and the bourgeoisie ; they are self-employed and do not work for others, and thus their labour is not usurped. The profits they accrue in their activities come entirely to them, and are not ‘alienated’ by others.

This seemingly simple definition hides more problems than it solves, however. For one thing, the category covers all kinds of people, sometimes from other ‘modes of production’. Small, self-employed farmers are members of this class. So also, though, are small traders, such as self-employed shopkeepers who own their stores. But a self-employed doctor might also fit into this category. It is their relation to the means of production – what relation they have to the economic system – that determines their class position. But given the various kinds of people this throws together – farmers, shopkeepers, doctors – the political ambiguities are many, and it is hard to see how such a ‘class’, might act together politically, or whether indeed, they have economic, political and ideological interests in common.

There are few jokes in Marxism, so one must make the most of them when they come along. In *Das Capital*¹⁶⁴, Marx finds delight in talking about the process of colonization for one particular reason. While the old countries of Europe were beset by established class structures, the new colonies, like Australia, had one very different condition to offer – seemingly unlimited land. Once that land was made available to new settlers, these new arrivals could escape capitalism entirely by working for themselves. They could become self-employed owners of their own farms – a new petty bourgeoisie :

... in the colonies ... the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems, manifests itself here practically in a struggle between them ... So long, therefore, as the labourer can accumulate for himself — and this he can do so long as he remains possessor of his means of production (land) — capitalist accumulation and the capitalistic mode of production are impossible.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² See, among many others, the work of Eric Olin Wright on class structure, and, initially at least, *Class, Crisis and the State*, Verso, New York, 1985. Wright went on to write several other major works on this topic, and spent much time seeking to distinguish empirically between the major capitalist classes, and how one might ‘measure’ them. Many volumes by a variety of authors have pondered similar questions.

¹⁶³ This may be true in a technical sense, but it is rarely true in a day-to-day sense. For example, many small businesses are family businesses, and thus the ‘workers’ are family workers, often ill-paid or not paid at all. Traditionally, this structure was profoundly patriarchal, and thus exploitation certainly did take place, though often hidden from view. Then, too, such small businesses were deeply embedded in the capitalist structure, did business with it, depended on it, and were structured by the capitalist State. They were hardly separate from capitalism in any meaningful way.

¹⁶⁴ Volume I, chapter 33. See

¹⁶⁵ *Capital, Volume 1*, Chapter 33, pages 543-544, first published in 1867. This edition published in 1990 by Penguin Books, London, Ben Fowkes, translator.

Marx thought it a farcical misunderstanding of traditional political economists that capitalism was having a hard time in Australia because people found they could do better working for themselves, rather than working for someone else. Class, Marx reminds us, is not a thing, but a relationship between people, and self-employment offers a way out of class exploitation. You can bring as many people as you like to Australia, but if they won't work for you, and choose, rather, to work for themselves, you can't export capitalism :

Mr. Peel ... took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 300 persons of the working class, men, women, and children. Once arrived at his destination, "Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river." Unhappy Mr. Peel who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River! ¹⁶⁶

It is central to Poulantzas's argument that he makes it clear what is meant by the petty bourgeoisie in the context of fascism. He starts this task by asserting that it is essential to look at political and ideological factors to identify this class. Mere economic factors are not sufficient.¹⁶⁷ The class constitutes two separate entities, which at first glance, have little to do with each other, but they are brought together because of the proximity of their political and ideological characteristics. The traditional petty bourgeoisie is the category of small owners that Marx had spoken about. This kind of situation could exist either in agriculture, the small farmer, or in commerce, where someone owns their own business, such as a shop or a small company. In both situations, the people involved neither exploit labour, nor are they themselves exploited. They have escaped capitalism, as it were.¹⁶⁸

But there is a second grouping who might also be put into the same class. These might include the emerging category of workers we would now call service employees - working in commerce, banking and the like - as well as civil servants, the gathering numbers of people now working in the State apparatus. Clearly this second group of people are not self-employed owners, Poulantzas admits, but they share similar political and ideological qualities with the traditional petty bourgeoisie.

What, then, constitutes this 'petty bourgeois ideology'? Poulantzas sees this system of ideas as a borrowing of bourgeois and working class ideas simultaneously, and predominantly the borrowings are from the working class. This results in certain key ideas prevailing – an aversion to big business, or anti-capitalism ; a belief in the myth of the ladder, founded on faith in social mobility, and the climb to the top ; and a belief in the neutral State which exists 'above classes', and which may be able to aid petty bourgeois interests.¹⁶⁹ These ideas, he argues, are shared between small owners and salaried workers, whose exploitation is hidden behind a salary.

Not only are there ideological similarities between the two groups, but they have political commonalities as well.¹⁷⁰ Neither group can organize politically around the two other classes – they are thrown together, as it were. Thus they often turn to the State itself for support and assistance. There is therefore a special affinity for the State, and a willingness to support its aims. They therefore constitute a 'normative' group that upholds the social order.¹⁷¹ And in times of crisis, they

¹⁶⁶ Op. Cit., page 543.

¹⁶⁷ *FD*, 237.

¹⁶⁸ *FD*, 238

¹⁶⁹ *FD*, 241.

¹⁷⁰ *FD*, 243-244.

¹⁷¹ *FD*, 243.

are likely to act together. Poulantzas thereby concludes that these two disparate elements of the social landscape logically comprise a distinct social class founded in ideological and political similarities.¹⁷²

While constituting a social class, it is also true that, like other classes, that there are various fractions of the class to consider. This fractioning may be enhanced in conditions of crisis. And while this class may not be one of the two major classes,¹⁷³ it does constitute an '*authentic social force*',¹⁷⁴ and it can play a separate political role in certain circumstances. This is a significant point because the petty bourgeoisie played an important and autonomous role in the rise of fascism, a point largely overlooked by the 'dolls' in the Comintern, Poulantzas's favourite whipping boys.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Poulantzas wants to argue that the petty bourgeoisie was one of the strongest supporters of fascism to the end, even as their own economic position was damaged by the new rising tide of monopoly capitalism.

What precise role, then, does the petty bourgeoisie, play in the rise of the fascist State – this is the purpose of this long definitional excursus. Fascism is, first and foremost, a vehicle for the rise of large capital, and especially monopoly capital, and it is especially threatening to small businesses, who seem to be directly undermined by large businesses entering the retail sector, for example. For salaried workers, however, there is a rise in numbers, and perhaps the chance for progress.¹⁷⁶ At first, the petty bourgeoisie swing to the side of the workers, but this strategy fails them. They lose faith with the party system which does not seem to represent them, and they turn instead to the fascist movement, where their political force is felt most keenly. In the earliest days, much of the membership of the fascist movement is found among the petty bourgeoisie.¹⁷⁷ Indeed the early party political agendas closely parallel the complaints of this class about the existing economic system. The use of the State to protect its interests allows it to be distinct from large capital interests. It is important to remember that fascism started as an anti-capitalist movement wholly in keeping with petty bourgeois ideology. Only later do the interests of large capital come to predominate. Thus, during the first phase of fascism, the petty bourgeoisie are in the ascendancy – Poulantzas goes as far as to call them 'the ruling class', a phrase which echoes Gramsci's earlier pronouncements.¹⁷⁸ As things develop, they remain in charge of the State, but they no longer control society as a whole, a role taken up by large capital interests.

The rise of fascism result from a crisis of hegemony, a conclusion widely agreed on by analysts from the left. Elements of petty bourgeois ideology surge forward and are rediscovered in the vacuum of persuasive ideas, anti-capitalism being amongst them. It is able to fill the gap :

¹⁷² FD, 244.

¹⁷³ Poulantzas appears to contradict himself here. Having said, on the very same page, that the petty bourgeoisie do constitute a class, he then argues, at the bottom of the same page that '... the petty bourgeoisie does not in the long term have a class position of its own'. FD, 244. He appears to be saying that the petty bourgeoisie is a transitional class, destined to slip into the proletariat for the most part.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ FD, 245.

¹⁷⁶ Poulantzas sees the two fractions of the petty bourgeoisie going their separate ways here, the small business people being harmed, the salaried workers being advantaged by the same trend. He then makes a half-hearted argument about the pauperization of the salaried workers (See footnote 1, page 247) due to increased competition, but he doesn't seem to have much confidence in the argument. He falls back on the acceptance that the two groups do not have common economic interests, but that they continue to share ideological and political commonality.

¹⁷⁷ FD, 249.

¹⁷⁸ FD, 250.

When fascism comes to power, an apparently paradoxical phenomenon results : *the petty bourgeois ideological sub-ensemble ... 'replaces' the dominant bourgeois ideology, thereby cementing back together the social formation in question.* It therefore takes on the role previously played by bourgeois ideology, both for the bourgeoisie itself, and for the working class.¹⁷⁹

This 'new' ideology still contains within it many elements of the dominant world view, which has been entirely eclipsed by the rise of the new régime. The new ideology thus masks the dominant ideology under a new guise. But the emerging ideology is in closer alliance with imperialism, rather than traditional capitalism. Poulantzas wants to insist that the newly-formed ideology of the fascist State is an amalgam of contradictory ideas, rather than a logically coherent world view.¹⁸⁰ He then lists a number of key elements of this ideology :

1. Emphasis on the cult of the State, in which the individual is subsumed by the State.¹⁸¹
2. The cult of the leader, the avoidance of the judiciary, and a love of direct action.
3. Elitism, seeking leadership roles for the petty bourgeoisie.
4. Racism and antisemitism.
5. Nationalism, the myth of the nation, ties to 'soil' and 'blood'.
6. Militarism, and the cult of violence.
7. Anti-clericalism, opposition to big landed interests and the property holdings of the Church.¹⁸²
8. The role of the family as central to economic and social organization separate from class struggle.
9. Emphasis on education, training the new labour force, the rise of 'new' men and women.
10. Anti-intellectualism.
11. Corporatism, bringing all elements of society together under petty bourgeois control.

How did this class actually fare under fascism? In spite of its leading role in the new society, the petty bourgeoisie did poorly.¹⁸³ Small business people were badly harmed by the rise of big capital, and simultaneously, Poulantzas wants to argue, fascist wage policy also harmed salaried workers. Both elements of this disparate grouping were thus damaged in separate ways.

In *Germany*, it was clear before the war that small-scale traders were already on a declining trend, whereas the category of employees and officials was expanding.¹⁸⁴ As the fascist State came into being, it was clear that party membership came largely from white-collar workers, government officials and small traders.¹⁸⁵ The election results told the same story. In the short-term, the rise of fascism seemed to meet the needs of the petty bourgeoisie. But according to Poulantzas this close alliance between fascism and the small owners was illusory :

The real interest of the urban petty bourgeoisie were totally abandoned when national socialism came to power .. this was accomplished by steps ... During the first step, certain measures were taken in favour of the traditional fraction of the petty bourgeoisie. The activity of the big department stores was

¹⁷⁹ FD, 251.

¹⁸⁰ FD, 253.

¹⁸¹ FD, 254-256.

¹⁸² It is hard to swallow this element of fascist ideology without some thought. It may well have been part of petty bourgeois ideological armature, but it was not an enduring element of fascism. In Italy, the church rapidly signed up for cooperation with the fascist State, knowing that this would help in the fight against the atheist left.

¹⁸³ FD, 256-258.

¹⁸⁴ FD, 259. Again these two fractions of the petty bourgeoisie seem to be going in different directions, held together, in the Poulantzian argument, only by political and ideological elements.

¹⁸⁵ FD, 261.

restricted to some extent. In 1933, two autonomous corporations were created, a Corporation of Retail Trade (excluding large stores) and an artisan corporation ... Their purpose was the protection of small-scale production and petty trade. But these measures were abolished in 1934 ...¹⁸⁶

Price controls harmed small producers, and the war effort further placed pressure on this sector. The salaried employees category grew in number, though their real wages dropped by 20%.¹⁸⁷

In *Italy*, conditions were of a similar nature. Large capital had been advantaged by the war, while small businesses had faltered. Civil servants comprised a larger category than in Germany, drawing on people from the country, though salaried positions in business were fewer because capitalist business was poorly developed.¹⁸⁸ In the beginning of this new era, the petty bourgeoisie swung to the left, but when working class politics hit a wall, they rapidly swung their allegiance to the rising fascist party. They were over-represented in the membership of the fascist party, and the higher reaches of the party were dominated by this group.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, many ex-servicemen were members of the party, giving it an especially military look. The petty bourgeoisie did not do well in the end, as might have been anticipated. The tertiary sector increased substantially, but wages went down. The 'fascist bureaucracy' grew faster than in Germany.¹⁹⁰

Poulantzas, the State and the Rise of Fascism

The broad shape of Poulantzas's theory of the State under early fascism can now be examined in detail.¹⁹¹

1. First and foremost, this is a class account focusing on how classes and the State connect, foreshadowing the arguments he will put forward in his later books, and which he had already outlined in the earlier *Political Power and Social Classes*.¹⁹² Poulantzas continually structures his argument and indeed the shape of the book itself, around this question. Indeed, the very structure of the chapters is class-defined.

In Part Three, he speaks of the relationship between the dominant classes and fascism, and concludes, after much rumination, a review of the historical record, and barbed asides towards the falsely formulated Comintern line, that capitalism did very well out of the relationship with the emerging fascist State in both Italy and Germany. While the Comintern had claimed that fascism constituted the 'death rattle' of capitalism, Poulantzas argued that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, monopoly capital in particular soared forward under fascism, and thus established

¹⁸⁶ *FD*, 263

¹⁸⁷ *FD*, 264.

¹⁸⁸ *FD*, 265.

¹⁸⁹ *FD*, 266.

¹⁹⁰ *FD*, 267.

¹⁹¹ In *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*,¹⁹¹ which we will review below, he turned his attention to contemporary fascism, but for the moment, let us go backwards in historical time, and review his account of the State under fascism in Germany and Italy. I thus follow Poulantzas as he first traces the 1920-1940 period, then on to his account of contemporary events, contemporary, that is, for him.

¹⁹² *Political Power and Social Classes*, New Left Books and Sheed and Ward, 1975, London, but published first in 1968 in Paris by Maspero as *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*. PPSC thus comprises the first of his five major books.

itself in an advanced form. When the dust had settled, and all the other arguments had been put to one side, it was clear, in his view, that capitalism had not been cowed by the fascist State, had not been subordinated to it, and had retained its 'relative autonomy'.

In Part Four, he examines the working class. While initially open to the idea of an emerging State that seemed to incorporate unions and worker interests in its philosophy, the working class soon became subject to extreme violence, initially in the violent skirmishes that took place between leftist and fascist militia, and later in the collapse of the party system. In the end, the promises for union participation were not kept, and workers became subject to overwhelming State control.

In Part Five he turns to the petty bourgeoisie. Particularly significant in their strong support for the State as a neutral arbiter that might serve their cause, they became a most important element in the rise of fascism. They provided some of the shock troops that first populated the fascist militia, but they also provided the majority of personnel for the developing State apparatus. Coupled with this, in the face of an ideological vacuum, they were able to offer up a replacement dominant ideology that provided the cement around which a new hegemony could be formed.

2. And it not just the focus on classes and the State that distinguishes Poulantzas's State theory. The originality of his approach also lies in the way in which he both *periodizes* these relationships, and focuses on *class fractions*. In his periodization, he takes us through the history of the period, and shows us the steps in the formation of the class-State nexus for each class. Thus we are able to see how these relationships evolve and how they turn out in the end. And, at the same time, he is willing and able to accept the confusion that surrounds any class analysis because of the complicated sub-elements of any class – the various components and divisions that occur in real historical situations within any class. He does not avoid this complexity even though it muddies the theoretical picture. This greatly enriches the account he provides.

3. His analysis is further enlarged by his willingness to follow Gramsci in extending his State-theoretical position into the realms of the political and ideological, and well beyond the merely economic. Consider the case of the petty bourgeoisie, for example. The two categories within this class – the small owners and the rising salaried category do not have economic conditions in common. They are only brought together by their common ideological and political positions. If he is right, and the formulation is highly polemical, then he has been able to make a breakthrough in class analysis, far extending its boundaries, and showing the way forward to a wider understanding of class relations, an understanding that was taken up by many later theorists, including Stuart Hall, the Birmingham School and the later-evolving Critical Studies tradition, as well as Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁹³ This was the start of the 'Cultural Turn', the movement towards concentration on the lived culture of classes, as well as their economics and politics.

¹⁹³ Much more will be said about this movement in relation to State theory in later pages. I should emphasize that there is no simple link between Poulantzas's work and the work of, for example, Pierre Bourdieu. It is rather more the case that when traditional class analysis had been 'broken open' and liberated from economism, many other possibilities presented themselves. The connection between Hall and Poulantzas is close. Poulantzas published in *New Left Review*, a journal that Hall and others founded, and Hall interviewed Poulantzas shortly before his death. On the other hand, Bourdieu had little if anything to do with Poulantzas, and Bourdieu's class analysis, though strongly 'culturalist', has no close theoretical affiliation with Poulantzas's work. But in the wake of Poulantzas's work, a new theoretical space did open up, into which many new lines of thought entered.

4. Poulantzas also takes seriously Gramsci's notion of hegemony, closely tied to his extension of class analysis into the realm of politics and economics.¹⁹⁴ Fascism, he reminds us again and again, along with Gramsci, arises from the failure of the 'national project'. No overarching common sense prevails – the political parties no longer represent the majority of the people, and the national sensibility is floundering. Into this vacuum floods the violence and the militaristic force of fascism, but in order for the fascist State to survive, it must provide not just force, but also a new hegemony, a new consensual ideology that can embrace the wide array of interests and ideologies that it seeks to represent. Petty bourgeois ideology, with its confusing and often contradictory elements, embodying ancient myths of 'blood' and 'bone', as well as the cult of the State, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-clericism, anti-intellectualism, and a strong adherence to violence, was able to cohere into a national ideology sufficient to hold the warring factions together.

5. Poulantzas's notion of the 'power bloc' is also a valuable contribution to the State theory. Arguing that classes battle within their ranks, and that even the ruling class must be organized, he claimed that in order for the bourgeoisie to survive, they needed to form a 'power bloc', with the help of the State, in order to stop them tearing themselves apart because of their often bitterly-divided interests. The fascist State is able to do this, thus bringing monopoly capital to an advanced stage.

6. But perhaps the most important concept that Poulantzas brings to the table is his notion of 'relative autonomy'. Much more will be heard about this idea as we examine the 'normal' State in the coming pages, where it plays a predominant explanatory role. But Poulantzas is able to claim, quite dramatically, that fascism is not just violence. Just as classes are not just economics, so too the fascist State survives not just because it can resort to brutal tactics and threats, but because it contrives a long and elaborate balancing act between the various social forces that it seeks to manage. It is not just in the 'normal' State that this occurs, he is claiming, but even in the State taken to the extreme, as in the case of fascism, such a strategy is still followed. He provides many examples showing how State policy and leadership twists and turns in order to accommodate the requirements of social equilibrium. Thus the State never becomes the mere instrument of capital any more than it plays into the hands of the petty bourgeoisie or the workers. This game of relative autonomy allows the fascist leaders to maintain ultimate power in the end while seeking alliances with all constituents. Even fascism must engage in this elaborate dance if it is to succeed.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Poulantzas reminds us that it is only Gramsci who extends the account of the State into the ideological realm (*FD*, 299) He comments ... as little as I know Gramsci's work, there can be no doubt that it was he who formulated the theory of ideological apparatuses as State apparatuses ... (but his) ... theory is still tainted by a language stemming from the 'historicist' conception, and from certain related notions such as that of 'civil society'; this even affects his concept of 'hegemony' ... but May-June 1968 in France showed once again how correct Gramsci's analysis was ... (*FD*, 300)

¹⁹⁵ Poulantzas spends Part Six of the book discussing the countryside. I do not review this section here. He deals the complexity of classes in the countryside. He reminds us that feudalism and capitalism lived side by side in the country. He distinguishes between five major classes; the great landowners; the rich and upper middle peasantry; the middle peasantry; the poor and lower middle peasantry; and the agricultural labourers proper. (*FD*, 270-277) His aim is to correct the simplistic notion that the countryside is simply a hotbed of fascism. Things are more complicated than that. Rural labourers did very poorly from fascism, as well as the small farmers, as capitalism flooded the countryside. Complexity, complexity and more complexity is his constant theme.

The Institutional Forms of the Fascist State

Having regaled us with pages of history, Poulantzas finishes *Fascism and Dictatorship* by turning to what he calls ‘the institutional forms of the fascist State’.¹⁹⁶ Starting with Gramsci, from whom he has clearly learnt much, he reminds us of what we already know – that it was Gramsci who saw that the State was much more than coercion, but extended its activities into the ideological realm in order to construct a new hegemony.¹⁹⁷ Poulantzas then suggests that it was Gramsci who led us to the idea of ideological State apparatuses, an idea followed up by Althusser and others.¹⁹⁸ Then follows a flurry of definitional fury.¹⁹⁹ He reminds us that ideology permeates the mores, the customs, the ‘way of life’ of a society (or social formation, as he terms it), and that it embodies a large variety of apparatuses, including the Churches, parties, unions, universities, the ‘means of communication’, the cultural domain, and the family.²⁰⁰ He provides the list merely to show that this is a repressive part of the State. Ideology, he asserts is never neutral – it is always a class ideology. Repression and ideology work hand in hand to secure the State.²⁰¹

The State, may, on occasion, also intervene directly in the economy. And many bodies normally referred to as private entities must be considered as elements of the State, as suggested in the long list of ideological institutions above.²⁰² And here he comes to the ‘heart of the matter’:

It is possible to refer to *the* State apparatus, narrowly defined, *in the singular*, whereas one speaks of *several* ideological State apparatuses.²⁰³

Why is this point of such breath-taking importance that he calls us up short, and makes a very clear point about it? It is as if he has been circling a particular idea, and has now come to understand what it is. He is still ruminating, however, because there is no earth-shattering conclusion just yet. The State has several repressive elements – the army, the police and so on. This is the institutional core of the State. The ideological apparatus is more widely spread. In fact, it has relative autonomy from the State. Poulantzas has now veered away from discussions of fascism in particular towards a general analysis of the State.²⁰⁴ But his central conclusion at this point seems only to be that while the repressive State apparatus comprises the core of the State, the ideological apparatus is spread far and wide.

But then Poulantzas turns his attention back to fascism.²⁰⁵ Fascism is without doubt a capitalist State, but it is an exceptional State. It develops as a result of a specific political and hegemonic

¹⁹⁶ *FD*, pages 299-359. This phrase appears on page 298.

¹⁹⁷ *FD*, 299.

¹⁹⁸ *FD*, 300.

¹⁹⁹ For example in footnote 5, page 303, he takes Althusser to task for failing to examine the economic role of the State.

²⁰⁰ I am paraphrasing a list provided on page 301.

²⁰¹ *FD*, 302.

²⁰² *FD*, 305.

²⁰³ *FD*, 305.

²⁰⁴ And again he turns away from his own argument to suggest that Althusser is in error by arguing for the essential unity of ruling class ideology. In contrast, Poulantzas wants to claim that several ideologies struggle for control in any given society. Althusser is particularly criticized for excluding class struggle from the analysis.

²⁰⁵ *FD*, 310-330. The text is repetitive here, so I rehearse only novel arguments that we have not heard before. On page 311, footnote 2, he provides reference to parallel arguments made in *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit. What is new here is the comparison between the ‘Normal’ State and the ‘Exceptional State’.

crisis. Poulantzas then takes us through a rather elaborate set of distinctions between a form of State and a form of régime which he plans to use in the remainder of his exposition.

Relative autonomy is still part of the fascist State, particularly the way in which the economic is separate from the political, and the way in which the State is autonomous from the dominant classes.²⁰⁶ But the way in which the fascist State intervenes in the economic life of the nation is of particular importance. Traditional scholarship wants to claim that under fascism, all is subsumed under the totalitarian State. Poulantzas wants to argue in the opposite direction that relative autonomy is maintained.²⁰⁷ There are many more similarities between the fascist capitalist State and the ‘normal’ capitalist State than have been realised. They vary in the degree of limitation or suppression allowed to the ideological State apparatuses. And this limitation on the ideological apparatus results from the hegemonic crisis.²⁰⁸ There is more physical repression, to be sure, under fascism. But then also the State has to play a more active role in recovering hegemony than in normal conditions. There is also a need for a new and separate ideology in all forms of the State :

... the State apparatuses ‘secrete’ *their own internal ideology*. But in those State forms not corresponding to a political and ideological crisis, this internal ideology is often perceptibly different from the dominant ideology : for example, the State ‘bureaucracy’, the army, the Church and the educational system all have an own internal ideology of their own.²⁰⁹

While Poulantzas is often rehearsing old arguments in this final section, the notion of a ‘secreted’ internal ideology is new, and he usefully explains how this difference between the ‘normal’ State and the ‘exceptional’ might best be understood. In these conditions, the ideological States apparatuses have less autonomy than before, and the two forms of ideology, the internal ideology and the dominant ideology, line up more closely. But now he takes his argument to an extreme position, and claims that under fascism, it may be that the ideological State apparatus dominates over the repressive elements. This seems mildly surprising :

In the case of the exceptional State, the reorganization of the State system *can sometimes go so far* as to let an ideological apparatus dominate the whole system.²¹⁰

This comment requires some thought. It may well be that there are moments when ideology takes hold, and is the central component of State activity. But overall, can he really be suggesting that ideology dominates the State under fascism? In certain case, and he cites Bonapartism as a case in point, he claims this can happen.²¹¹

Fascism is also distinctive in that it changes the ‘legal State’ to the ‘police State’.²¹² What Poulantzas is underlining is that the liberal State is the State found in competitive capitalism, and the fascist State is that form of the State required for monopoly capitalism. They are thus two forms of State for two stages of capitalist evolution. What then, precisely, are the differences? The legal system within the ‘normal’ State manages the use of political power through a series of formal rules. It manages the State apparatus on behalf of the power bloc. But it also provides a mechanism

²⁰⁶ FD, 314.

²⁰⁷ See his debate with Arendt and others on this matter on pages 314-315.

²⁰⁸ FD, 316. Again the contrast between exceptionalism and normality is outlined.

²⁰⁹ FD, 317

²¹⁰ FD, 319.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² FD, 320.

whereby the dominated classes secure the illusion that the law protects them as well. The law also sets limits on what State power can do.²¹³

Within the 'exceptional' State, the same set of rules that governed State action are missing. The legal system becomes arbitrary. At the same time, the law no longer limits the action of the State, which might be said to have unlimited powers. The judiciary are now directly under the thumb of the dominant elements in the State. Within the 'private' law that manages the economy, the differences lie again in the stage of capitalism reached in each State, and many similarities remain.²¹⁴

The fascist State modifies the electoral system in a decisive way. Its rise results from a crisis in political representation, in which the parties are unable to represent their constituents. In the case of the exceptional State, the traditional method of representation is put to one side, and the State takes its place. It is important, Poulantzas argues, to be clear about what is happening. The exceptional State is not replacing the competitive system of parties in which all society's participants have a chance to gain power. This illusion is never true in 'normal' capitalism, where a circulation of elites takes place that provides little opportunity for the working masses to gain power. Instead it must be understood as a reshuffling of the power bloc. And, Poulantzas continues, this 'shuffling' persists within the structure of the 'exceptional' fascist State. Even within fascism, the various elements of the ruling class still struggle for domination.²¹⁵ But in the normal State, there are 'possibilities for action', as, for example in the gaining of universal suffrage.²¹⁶ In the exceptional State, such possibilities are snuffed out.

Poulantzas concludes this section with two minor points.²¹⁷ First he points to the role that the extended bureaucracy plays in the exceptional State. Key again is the notion of the bureaucracy's *internal ideology*²¹⁸ closely allied to petty bourgeois thinking. Second, he wants to emphasize that the class struggle continues within the State, even under the conditions of exceptionalism. He wants to claim that these struggles can be extremely violent, and can threaten the solidity of the State itself.²¹⁹ Poulantzas seems to be positing that the exceptional State in fact sets up parallel systems of control, a '*duplication of parallel power networks*', as he puts it,²²⁰ to represent various classes within the State structure itself. Perhaps he is asserting that certain State apparatuses represent certain social classes, class fractions or social forces, and that the struggle between these various State bureaucracies is also a struggle between these interests. It seems that by the end of this section he is making this claim :

If power is organized in this way, it also allows the exceptional State to play the specific interventionist role required by the crisis conjuncture – to juggle the various classes and fractions through parallel, super-imposed channels, and thereby to reorganize class hegemony.²²¹

This is a somewhat dramatically new idea – a vision of the exceptional State as ridden with parallel systems of organizations, in turn driven by various elements of the class structure, and at war with one

²¹³ FD, 321-322.

²¹⁴ FD, 323.

²¹⁵ FD, 325-326.

²¹⁶ FD, 326.

²¹⁷ FD, 327-330.

²¹⁸ His italics in the original. See page 327. This is an idea that he has introduced some pages before on page 317. It is one of the ways that petty bourgeois thinking penetrates the State at a deep level.

²¹⁹ On page 329 Poulantzas comments : "The exceptional State, like every capitalist State, is a giant with feet of clay".

²²⁰ FD, 329.

²²¹ Ibid.

another. Curiously, the thought comes at the end of a chapter, and it not fully developed. It is an instance of what one of his critics would later call an ‘outburst of taxonomic fury’.²²²

But Poulantzas is not done yet with establishing new categories. In the last section of the book, he wants to add some thoughts on the ‘Form of the Exceptional Regime’, filling in some of the gaps he feels he has still left in his already exhaustive account of the fascist State.²²³ Here Poulantzas often repeats elements of the earlier arguments, and our task here is just to decide what emerges as new formulations. He begins by reminding us that the fascist State establishes the permanent mobilization of the masses.²²⁴ He rehearses again the stages of the rise of fascism – the first stage during which the fascist party dominates the army and the police, the administration and the judiciary.²²⁵ He reminds us of the limited autonomy of the ideological state apparatuses, an argument that has been raised before. The fascist party never quite fuses with the State but manages the social formation through its apparatus. And he adds that we must remember that fascism came to power, in both Germany and Italy, in a perfectly respectable parliamentary way.²²⁶

Then he returns to Italy and Germany again. It is as if he is trying to refine his argument just once more, and finally nail all the bits and pieces down. But what is there that is new in this section? In the case of Germany, he provides some further historical detail, especially a detailed account of the rise of the SS, and the SS State.²²⁷ The section is thus valuable in the task of fleshing out the rather dry theoretical categories of the last 300 pages with some rich historical material. Here history takes over from theory, and a most interesting story is told. Of some especial interest is the section on the significance of the family in the new fascist ideology, and its close connection to petty bourgeois ideology.²²⁸ In his coverage of Italy, he follows a similar path. Again, the section is rich with historical examples illustrating what has gone before. In Italy, no SS existed, and thus there was less control of the State by the ‘political police’, as Poulantzas refers to them. Of interest here are the reflections on the role of the church and the State in Italian fascism.²²⁹ The church was the ‘favoured stronghold’ of the landowners.²³⁰ The close affiliation between fascism and the Church is outlined, and importantly he sets this development against Mussolini’s initial ‘opium of the people’ line, and the hostility of the large landowners to unification. The close relationship established through the Lateran pacts (1929) enabled the new State to ‘buy the Church out’, as Poulantzas has it. But again, we have read these words before.

Much still remains to be covered, our author concludes after this long exegesis. Will fascism rise again? Both the left and the right were raising this issue in 1970. Has history taught us how to deal with this possibility? Imperialism is also changing, and this complicates matters. Do we learn from history? Poulantzas comments :

Marx, following Hegel, said that history can sometimes repeat itself : but what the first time was tragedy, is the second time farce. The formulation is striking, but it is true in one sense only : there are such

²²² Ernesto Laclau, ‘The Specificity of the Political’, in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, (London, 1977) page 70.

²²³ Pages 331-356. There is also a conclusion that follows this section.

²²⁴ *FD*, 331

²²⁵ *FD*, 332

²²⁶ *FD*, 333.

²²⁷ *FD*, 340-342.

²²⁸ *FD*, 346.

²²⁹ *FD*, 355.

²³⁰ *FD*, 355.

things as black comedies. Louis Bonaparte was only funny from a particular point of view. And there are funny men in history who only kill others.²³¹

3. Poulantzas and the Living Dictatorships : *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*

We turn now to Poulantzas's second book on fascism and dictatorships, *La Crise des Dictatures*,²³² which is much different from the first. Unlike the encyclopaedic certainty of *Fascism and Dictatorship*, the second book is brief, somewhat sketch-like, and uncertain in its tone. It is also contemporary, no longer drawing us back into history, but rather telling the readers in the mid-seventies what was happening in their present world in Greece, Portugal and Spain. What was happening, of course, was the collapse of these living dictatorships.

Again, Poulantzas takes a class-driven approach, setting out chapters on the dominant classes, and what he now terms 'the popular classes'. He sets the argument out in the shadow of the 'imperialist world context' and ends with comments on the State apparatus. What is the question he is trying to answer? :

The Portuguese and Greek regimes were evidently not overthrown by an open and frontal movement of the popular masses in insurrection, nor by a foreign military intervention, as was the case with Italian fascism and Nazism in Germany. What, then, are the factors that determined their overthrow, and what form has the intervention of the popular masses taken in this conjuncture?²³³

From the very first page, the reader is put on alert that old theories of revolution will not do, that the orthodox Soviet line from the Comintern, is wrong again, and that the anticipated rising of the masses against the bourgeois order has again not occurred as predicted. Indeed, Poulantzas seems uncertain whether these changes involved class struggle at all.²³⁴

He launches us first into the book with a review of the 'The Imperialist World Context'. At first glance, this suggests he is taking note of some of the new work emerging at this time on world systems, but there is no mention of the work of Wallerstein and others.²³⁵ Instead Poulantzas seems driven by historical events entirely. But he is interested here, in a way not seen in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, by questions of under-development, a central idea in the emerging new literature. Indeed, he seems to be looking for an account of the collapse of the régimes in terms of this system, in which the United States dominates. Each of these three States seems to exhibit a similar form of dependence in the new world order. Could it be, he asks, that each of these countries was defined

²³¹ *FD*, 358.

²³² *La Crise des Dictatures*, Maspero, Paris, 1975. Published by New Left Books as *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, in London in 1976. Translated by David Fernbach. The book was published early in 1975, so we can imagine he was working on this book during 1974. This fits with the April, 1974 ending for the régimes both in Portugal and Greece,

²³³ *La Crise des Dictatures*, (CD), page 7.

²³⁴ These events are important, Poulantzas claims, because events in Latin America are moving in a fascist direction, and the core metropolitan states in Europe are not unaffected. This is not to be an 'exhaustive' account, and it assumes a factual knowledge of events in the reader. He is wary of making his account too dry, so plans to bring in some history. He does not examine the organizations of the left in any detail. He is also going in another direction from the arguments set out in *Fascism and Dictatorship* – he has changed his mind. (CD, 8-9) With this throat-clearing out of the way, we launch in.

²³⁵ See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1974.

by neo-colonialism, and that this feature accounts for these recent shifts? Perhaps slow industrialization, and thus a slow-to-emerge capitalism, with its attendant classes, was at the heart of the matter. Perhaps these countries are dependent on the core capitalist countries in some way? He introduces the concept of *dependent industrialization* to account for this possibility.²³⁶ What he means by this is that certain predominantly capitalist countries, among which Portugal, Spain and Greece may be counted, can be characterised by low-technology industrialization, weak labour productivity, and with a high level of profit expatriation. These countries provided low-cost labour to the rest of Europe, and these characteristics of dependent industrialization seem common to all three.²³⁷ At the core of this process was the influx of capital from overseas. Poulantzas then briefly rehearses several development theories before dismissing them, and coming back to an argument involving the ‘popular masses’, his now favoured phrase for the working class and its allies. He still closely aligns himself to the likelihood that the socialist revolution is on the horizon :

... we must be clear as to what is involved here. It is obvious that a country’s dependence vis-à-vis imperialism can only be broken by a process of national liberation, which in the new phase of imperialism and the present circumstances as a whole, coincides with a process of transition to socialism.²³⁸

These dictatorships, Poulantzas concludes at the end of this section on the world system, comprise a *dependent type of state*.²³⁹ But it is also the case that the specific form that the State takes in these societies results also from internal factors. If this is the case, then we must consider both internal and external factors together as we look for the cause of their collapse. Even in Chile, where the role of the CIA is clear in the overthrow of the Allende regime, we should not overlook the importance of the internal situation, and how it was handled by the leftist regime.²⁴⁰ We must look to the internal forces of a country for answers, as well as the position of States in the world system.

Having set us up in this way for further analysis, Poulantzas now turns to a consideration of each country in turn and how they sit in the world system.²⁴¹ We already know that both domestic and international factors are at work. The specific problem of importing capital is also in operation – that too is clear. The pattern he discovers is that foreign capital appears to have been used to further exploit colonial labour through the agency of these three nation States.²⁴²

A high level of imported capital was also associated with the further repression of the popular masses within these countries, preventing strikes, banning unions, repressing wage demands, and so on. But as the period of dictatorship lengthened, close ties were made with the European Union, compared with the United States. Thus the question might be posed – did the Common Market²⁴³ play a role in bringing these régimes to an end? As the Common Market developed, it was argued that American

²³⁶ CD, 14.

²³⁷ Poulantzas then documents his case with detailed statistics in all three countries.

²³⁸ CD, 20.

²³⁹ His phrase and his italics, page 21.

²⁴⁰ CD, 22. Poulantzas seems to be laying the blame on Allende for not managing the forces of the left in the appropriate in order to secure a plausible hegemony in his new regime, rather than taking the easy step of placing all the blame on American imperialism. It would not have been possible for outsiders to interfere, he seems to be suggesting, if the left hadn’t made such a mess of things.

²⁴¹ CD, 24-40.

²⁴² CD, 24. While this pattern of development happened throughout Europe, the system of regulation was especially lax in these three countries, allowing the free flow of capital, and the repatriation of profits without interference.

²⁴³ An early phrase for the European Union.

hegemony was coming to an end, and that Europe was beginning to pose a counter-hegemonic force.²⁴⁴ This was always a false argument in some ways. American imperialism was never completely hegemonic, and nor would the European Union ever completely 'take over'. Instead, it is more useful to try to understand the struggles for hegemony that commonly characterise the economic world system. Indeed, Poulantzas claims, the emergence of the European Union simply allows the further penetration of American capital into Europe. But at the same time, there are new struggles developing in the capitalist world order. Struggles are occurring both within Europe and in the old colonies.

An easy argument presents itself, and it is one that Poulantzas is keen to dismiss immediately. It is the claim that the democratic European union placed pressure on the dictatorships for them to follow the democratic path, while the United States supported and preferred dictatorship.²⁴⁵ All three countries sought entry into the Common Market in order to advance the causes of the several bourgeoisies involved. But their exclusion did not reach the level of an 'economic boycott'. As large agricultural producers, it is more likely the case that these three nations threatened the internal integrity of the EU with regard to agriculture. More precisely, Poulantzas wants to have his cake and eat it. He at first dismisses the rise of the Common Market as an insubstantial reason for the collapse, but then begins to admit the value of this approach if seen through a slightly different lens that he is happy to provide. The struggles between the dominant classes in Europe and the United States required a realignment in the dictatorships to deal with a changing picture. But it didn't simply mean the overthrow of the dictatorships by democracy :

These countries do not face a real choice between being 'American colonies' or being 'integrated into the Common Market'. The only solution for them is a process of independence and national liberation vis-à-vis imperialism as a whole.²⁴⁶

Nonetheless, public opinion and the 'solidarity of the democratic and popular movements in the European countries' did play a part in the transition phase. And it allowed the Common Market to play hard to get, given the antipathy surrounding these regimes. Military strategy was also important. The traditional Atlantic Alliance was also at risk.²⁴⁷ But it was also clear that Europe was not about to set itself free from the United States, but rather that Europe sought to develop some new degrees of freedom. In addition, the pro-Arab attitudes of Greece and Spain, tied closely to their business interests in this area, contrasted sharply with those of the United States. Thus there was never a simple relationship of control and subordination between the U.S. and the dictatorships. Given the important role of the military in each of the three régimes, military alliances were always going to be of the greatest importance. This long account amounts to a claim that internal factors matter more

²⁴⁴ *CD*, 26.

²⁴⁵ *CD*, 28-29.

²⁴⁶ *CD*, 31.

²⁴⁷ There is a curious analytic style operating in the book that is only partly developed here, as if the author is caught between a very rigorous systematization of the argument, and a looser, rambling account. Several times in the chapter Poulantzas begins lists, and starts to number sections of the argument. But the numbering system seems to be overcome by textual profligacy on several occasions, and the system does not cohere well. In this section on Europe and the United States, the substance of the argument is that he agrees with claims made that Europe pressed the dictatorships towards democracy, as many had claimed, but he is unwilling to accept these arguments without reformulating them very thoroughly. The reformulation is, however, very incomplete. He is thinking out loud on the page. In addition, he is living through these events as he writes, adding a further complication.

than external factors, and that we need to look to these internal factors for our best explanation of the collapse.²⁴⁸

We now turn to the role of the United States in these matters. It is certain that the United States favoured dictatorship, just as it had all over the world. Dictatorship allows much more control over democratic forces, and allows for smoother capital accumulation. But Poulantzas wants to guard against the view that the U.S., finally losing patience with the dictatorships, decided to step in and change things. The role of internal forces is neglected in such an argument, and thus it will not do. Several possible alternatives for Greece are rehearsed,²⁴⁹ alternatives posed from an American point of view. Poulantzas sees American policy as ‘polyvalent’, providing various alternatives, some of which may be followed, and some which are not. It is insufficient simply to argue that the United States gets its way all time, independent of conditions on the ground. And the U.S. may well lose influence in certain circumstances, as it appears to be doing in Greece and Spain. Too often we over-estimate the strength of the enemy. Instead, capitalist interests are often at loggerheads domestically and internationally, and the United States itself veers between the imperialist world policeman role, and escaping towards isolationism.²⁵⁰ The several instruments of American state policy²⁵¹ (the CIA, the Pentagon and the Military, the State Department) can be used in a variety of ways, in ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ roles, and often simultaneously. Thus no single policy is followed. This means there is always room for manoeuvre in the countries subjected to American domination.

The global balance of power is also a factor. One must consider the Soviet Union. The two major powers have agreed on ‘spheres of influence’. The Soviet Bloc has clearly opposed the dictatorships, but what happens now? The crisis of the dictatorships means a realignment of forces, a change in the balance of power. These contradictions allow the ‘popular masses’ inside these three countries to consider their options, and it is to these internal questions that Poulantzas now turns.

So what, in all this, is the role of the dominant classes in the dictatorships?²⁵² Here is Poulantzas turning from analysis of the world order and replacing it with his more familiar class analysis. He has already established that industrialization is occurring in a dependent form in these three countries – dependent on larger hegemonic powers, such as the United States. What has this done to the rise of the ruling classes internally? One result is the rise of a new class fraction :

... a fraction which I have referred to elsewhere as the domestic bourgeoisie. As this industrialization gets under way, there develop nuclei of an autochthonic (indigenous) bourgeoisie with a chiefly industrial character ... grafting itself onto this process in the domain of light industry in the consumer goods field, more occasionally in heavy industry (consumer durables, textiles, engineering). As well as steel and chemicals, and finally in the construction industries (cement etc.) This is particularly the case in Greece ...²⁵³

The key point Poulantzas is pushing is that these new members of the dominant class arose with the development of foreign capital activity in their countries. And he wants to distinguish this class

²⁴⁸ *CD*, 33. We must never have simplicity, argues Poulantzas. The simple argument will never do. Back to complexity we go, it seems.

²⁴⁹ *CD*, 35.

²⁵⁰ *CD*, 37.

²⁵¹ Poulantzas has now dropped the habit of capitalizing ‘State’ whenever it appears in this book, a habit he followed in earlier writings. I follow his use of the word.

²⁵² *CD*, chapter three examines ‘The Dominant Classes.’

²⁵³ *CD*, 41-42.

fractions from the traditional oligarchy of established comprador bourgeoisie, those what have always traded with large foreign capitalist undertakings.²⁵⁴ These people often act as the agents of foreign capital, are entirely supported by it, and comprise, therefore, a different category. Such relationships provide an outpost for foreign capital in those countries in which they operate, and within those countries may also offer an avenue for further penetration into the markets of the colonies still controlled by these countries, as in the case of Portugal's African colonies.

In contrast, the domestic bourgeoisie gets less profit.²⁵⁵ But this group does not constitute a 'national bourgeoisie' that could provide an alternative vision for the nation that might turn in the direction of anti-imperialism. It does not constitute an alternative to comprador capitalism. In large part, this is because the domestic capitalists are dependent on the international capitalist system. Thus, they are unable to offer much resistance to existing class relations, or take a leading role among the dominant classes. They are divided among themselves, and they are also oriented towards external forces, and are thus further weakened in trying to establish resistance to outside forces. Portugal, Spain and Greece are distinct in Europe because they were unable to carry through their own bourgeois revolution fully without the help of external capital. They were stuck more tightly to established economic systems based in the rural economy and feudalism compared to other European countries. In particular, Poulantzas wants to claim, harking back again to Gramsci, these countries were unable to create a hegemonic discourse that could speak for the nation as a whole.²⁵⁶

So how, exactly, is it the case that the domestic bourgeoisie became so important in the dictatorships? Poulantzas argues that in each country they were able to remain critical and politically oppose the military regimes.²⁵⁷ He now cites two important elements of the argument.²⁵⁸ *Firstly*, it is clear that these countries were run by comprador capitalism, and that this class fraction was dominated by the military régimes in each case. The domestic bourgeoisie went along with such schemes, acting as the minor partner in the power bloc of the dominant classes. Somewhat distinctly, however, the domestic interests sought State support to protect it from overseas capital, playing the nationalist card, as it were. The fundamental political problem for these régimes were that they were unable to represent the various class fractions that constituted their various societies. Thus, while struggles occurred 'behind the scenes',²⁵⁹ it was often the case that the structure of the dictatorships, however they looked from the outside, was uncertain. Old, traditional, landed capital was at war with comprador capital, and even if this battle had been eased by the rise of the dictatorships, the emergence of domestic capital further added fuel to the flames.²⁶⁰ All that seems possible (Poulantzas is talking about current events in Greece) is a realignment of the various fractions of the bourgeoisie, with, perhaps, more influence accruing to the domestic fraction.

²⁵⁴ CD, 42.

²⁵⁵ Poulantzas comments : 'The domestic bourgeoisie ...has significant contradictions with it. This is principally because it is cheated in its share of the cake, as far as the exploitation of the masses is concerned ...' (CD, 43)

²⁵⁶ CD, 46.

²⁵⁷ Poulantzas now enters one of his familiar numbering regimes, as if to try and shape the argument more coherently. But there are only two points and each stretches over many pages. It is not clear that this helps to organize the argument in any noticeable way.

²⁵⁸ CD, 47-67.

²⁵⁹ Poulantzas's phrase, from page 50. CD 49-50.

²⁶⁰ On page 51, Poulantzas repeats himself. He reminds us that the domestic bourgeoisie was unable to mount a serious counterforce, that any movement to liberalize the press, or to form alliances with the popular masses was not tolerated, and they were not able to capture the public imaginary.

Domestic capital sees in the European Common market project the possibility of escaping from the clutches of American hegemony through comprador capitalism.²⁶¹ It wasn't simply a case of the dictatorships being in the clutches of American capital, or a lack of interest in Europe by the régimes. Rather, the straw had been bent too far towards America. And while international capitalism is important, the key struggles still occur within these three nation states, and not beyond them.

Secondly, Poulantzas considers the relation between the domestic bourgeoisie, the state and the 'popular masses'.²⁶² At the same time that the domestic bourgeoisie were emerging, so too changes were occurring among popular forces. There were closer and more conciliatory alliances developing between domestic capital and domestic working class groups, connections less likely to occur with overseas capital and its representatives – again the nationalist card was being played. In part this occurred because the domestic bourgeoisie were in the line of fire – they could not send their assets overseas at the first sign of trouble, as the comprador capitalists could. They needed to negotiate a working agenda with their domestic counterparts among the popular masses. They were tied together organically. Unlike classical fascism of the kind seen in Germany or Italy, these three régimes were unable to mobilize the masses, and thus unable to incorporate them into the structure of the State. Thus the domestic bourgeoisie had an advantage in this field. Monopoly capital in the domestic bourgeoisie, led the way, however, and not smaller businesses. Larger businesses are able to make broader concessions than smaller ones, and they were also likely to be advantaged more fully than smaller business should the entry to the Common Market take place.²⁶³

Thus what emerges is the rise of 'neo-capitalists' or 'enlightened' capitalists willing and able to work with the popular masses towards democracy.²⁶⁴ However hopeful these signs might be, none of them suggest any real independence for the three nations from the world capitalist system, nor, yet further, any possibility of the 'transition to socialism', now a distant goal unlikely to be achieved.²⁶⁵ But the tactical alliance between the domestic bourgeoisie and the popular masses was real. Should the left have made this alliance? Poulantzas is sure they should have, given that the goal in each case was the defeat of fascism.²⁶⁶ Real gains could and were made through this alliance. But who came to manage the new hegemony? This is a question of some importance. Whatever happens, Poulantzas predicts that the bourgeoisie will be in control once the transitions from dictatorship have taken place. Was a transition to socialism ever likely? In Portugal, the battle focused on colonial issues. Through a series of governments and disputes, the domestic bourgeoisie started to strengthen their control.²⁶⁷ But it is an incomplete change – little by the way of nationalization of industry is proposed, and foreign capital is still encouraged, even though it appears that this investment will be better controlled in the future. Thus there is no anti-monopoly policy being followed, and it still unclear what shape agrarian reform will take, an important issue in a country where large tracts of land still lie in a small number of hands. In none of this is there any serious

²⁶¹ CD, 52-53.

²⁶² CD, 55-67.

²⁶³ CD, 57.

²⁶⁴ Both terms used by Poulantzas on page 57.

²⁶⁵ CD, 59.

²⁶⁶ Poulantzas comments : "To defeat fascism, as Trotsky well said, one must make alliance with the devil himself". (page 59)

²⁶⁷ CD, 62. Poulantzas is now moving away from theoretical concerns and into the details of régime change, which he does at some length with the Portuguese case. See especially pages 63-66.

sign that socialism will play a part beyond a modest form of social democracy. What, then, has happened :

... what we see in Greece is a 'right-wing' sequel to the military dictatorship, and in Portugal a 'left-wing' one ... the difference between the two consists at the present time chiefly in the positions of strength that the popular masses and their organizations have managed to obtain *for their future struggles* – history does not stop short with the process of democratization.²⁶⁸

Poulantzas obviously leaves the door open for the transition to socialism to occur in the future, and he pins his hopes most clearly here on the left-wing nature of the new Portuguese régime. But he has shown one thing in this chapter, perhaps most clearly to himself. He has proved, to his own satisfaction at least, that democratization took place without this transition, nor through a process of national liberation. The end of the dictatorships took place under the management of the domestic bourgeoisie. We have thus to date underestimated the role this class fraction plays. It would have been better if the working class had done it, he argues, but the end of fascism brings with it decided advantages. Nonetheless, the present situation remains uncertain, and thus has within the seeds of hope for the future. We are left in no doubt of what this future would consist.²⁶⁹

Having placed the domestic bourgeoisie center stage in the revolutionary movement towards democracy in these three regimes, Poulantzas now turns to a consideration of the 'Popular Classes'.²⁷⁰ First, Poulantzas wants to set out what happened under dependent industrialization in these three countries. Some of these features are typical of any industrialising process, but these events were occurring much later in Greece, Spain and Portugal than elsewhere in Europe. The major features of this movement were huge increases in the urban population and the rise of the industrial working class ; the exodus from the country ; the proletarianization of some of the peasantry ; a substantial rise in the new middle class, and in the liberal professions.²⁷¹ Coupled with these changes were high rates of unemployment, a massive shift in agriculture, the rise of shanty towns and the emergence of conditions seen throughout the 'Third World', as it was then termed. The reasoning now turns back again to a world systems argument, and a focus on the movement of capital and labour around this system. The process results in the super-exploitation of labour, and leads to a series of popular struggles, which he sets out for us :²⁷² (i) Struggles about the conditions of work, and job security. (ii) Struggles over health and social issues (iii) Peasant Struggles (iv) Issues surrounding the position of women (v) Student Struggles (vi) The struggles within the intellectual class.

Nationalism plays a part in these particular countries to bring the working class together with the new rising petty bourgeoisie, found among the emerging white collar workers. Each can speak to the issue of national independence, and this becomes something of a rallying cry for several elements in society when the period of the transition emerges. The role of the domestic bourgeoisie must not be overlooked. Poulantzas sees the petty bourgeoisie as followers of this group, but also points to the triple alliance that develops between these classes and class fractions – the domestic bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the popular classes - as democratization appears on the horizon.

²⁶⁸ CD, 66.

²⁶⁹ CD, 67.

²⁷⁰ Chapter four, pages 68-89.

²⁷¹ Poulantzas lists these changes on page 68.

²⁷² CD, 71.

During the later period of the dictatorships, there was an increase in the purchasing power of the masses, even as the profits accrued at a very high rate among the comprador capitalists. The crisis developing in the 1970s among the core capitalist states started to become exported to subordinate states such as Greece, Portugal and Spain such that in each of these countries high rates of inflation resulted.²⁷³ This change then led to dramatic drops in living standards, and a curbing of the migration patterns that had previously been encouraged by core countries. This further resulted in increased unrest in the three societies under examination. And the causes of this unrest were complicated. Clearly the unrest centred on economic issues, but given that strikes and similar forms of resistance were deemed illegal in most cases, these struggles immediately took on a political character.²⁷⁴ But there was never any chance that a 'frontal attack on the state' would take place, nor was there the possibility of a general strike or a widespread insurrection. Clearly there are remnants of Comintern thinking being mulled over here, a musing on traditional models of popular strategic uprisings. But there were perhaps two exceptions to this situation. Poulantzas first cites the case of the Polytechnic uprising in Athens, in which 300,000 people demonstrated against the dictatorship, involving both students and workers.²⁷⁵ Then, too, there is the case of the African nationalist movements which developed in the Portuguese colonies. In both these cases, it can be argued that the popular masses showed their hand and had an influence on the established régimes. But the truth is that in each case, the regimes were already collapsing from within, and thus no argument can be sustained that a popular uprising caused régime downfall – it was already on the way. It must be concluded, then, he argues, that internal contradictions caused the change.²⁷⁶

A fundamental problem for all the dictatorships had been that, from the beginning in each case, and unlike in Italy and Germany, they had none of them found a way of incorporating working class interests into the structure of the state. They were never hegemonic and never gained widespread popular support. We are about to witness an important movement in Poulantzian thinking that is made very clear here.²⁷⁷ First, he comments :

It (this line of thinking) has led people to think of these states as separate from the 'civil society' of the popular masses, monolithically maintaining themselves in an ivory tower until a final confrontation makes them collapse like a house of cards.²⁷⁸

Nothing could be further from the truth. Such a view stems from a false and misleading understanding of the nature of the state itself as an 'instrument or thing' This reading of the state, he argues, goes back to Hegel and to the young Marx, and it leads to the claim that the state is a neutral object, which can be manipulated or used by which ever party or class that comes along.²⁷⁹ This, of course, is instrumentalism, a position Poulantzas has already critiqued vigorously and quite

²⁷³ CD, 75

²⁷⁴ CD, 76.

²⁷⁵ CD, 77.

²⁷⁶ CD, 77-78.

²⁷⁷ This is the first time this line of thinking appears in his treatment of fascism, though it has earlier appeared in *Political Power and Social Classes*.

²⁷⁸ CD, 80.

²⁷⁹ The discussion is on pages 81-82.

publically his exchanges with Ralph Miliband.²⁸⁰ Instead, Poulantzas wants to assert the notion of *the State as a Social Relation*.²⁸¹ Seeing the state as an instrument has dramatic consequences :

... this precisely makes it impossible to grasp the internal contradictions of the state itself. In no case, in fact, is the state a subject or a thing ; it is always by nature a relation, just as is 'capital' : to be more precise, the condensation of the balance of forces between the classes that is expressed in a specific manner within the state.²⁸²

If we see the dictatorships as states in which no fissures, breaks or contradictions are possible, then we misunderstand the nature of these régimes. If, on the other hand, we follow Poulantzas in seeing them as full of contradictions and struggles, then the transitions to democracy which follow can be clearly understood. We know also that repression is never enough, and that a hegemonic and cultural domination is necessary, orchestrated, if possible, by the focus on a commonly-agreed national project. Without these elements in place, any régime is on uncertain ground. Thus while they may seem monolithic, military dictatorships are often incoherent, having no set policies on a wide range of issues, and muddling through in many fields.

In these pages, Poulantzas raises many more questions than he answers. He seems to be endlessly wrestling with the lack of a popular uprising of any significance in each of these three countries, and the echoes of the Comintern party line are often in evidence. The possibility of the mass strike is again raised towards the end of the chapter, but immediately dismissed. What results is an acceptance of several alternative explanations. First, following on from his conclusions from the previous chapter, he accepts the leading role of the domestic bourgeoisie in developing a nationalist agenda around which members of the petty bourgeoisie and key elements of the popular masses could organise to defeat the dictatorships. Second, he asserts the important notion that these régimes were riven with internal contradictions from the first, making them vulnerable to a state of permanent uncertainty. Third, he argues that internal forces were more significant than any movements in the international world system. Finally, he accepts that these changes were a step forward for the popular classes, even though the 'revolution' is entirely incomplete from the position of the left.

Was a mass uprising from the left ever on the cards? Possibly in Portugal, where the transition went in a leftist direction, and where the Communist Party made important connections with certain elements in the military. But the chances were slim, and the changes that did occur towards social democracy must not be overlooked. In none of these cases did a pure revolution take place. The proletarian paradise was never on the cards. But the dictatorships were at an end, and we must count this a blessing. And we must hope for more in the years to come, claims our author.

Poulantzas now turns to a consideration of the state apparatuses, before a concluding chapter. The aim here is to examine more closely the internal contradictions that led to the changes in régime.²⁸³ Poulantzas starts down this part of the analytic road by arguing that no simple transition is possible from dictatorship to social democracy because dictatorships are incapable of change. What are the

²⁸⁰ We shall discuss this debate more fully at a later date. The debate occurred in the pages of the *New Left Review*.

²⁸¹ This emphasizes a huge shift in thinking that he wants to insist on in this political analysis, because it opens the door to a whole series of entirely new understandings of the political shifts in these three countries.

²⁸² *CD*, 82.

²⁸³ Chapter Five covers 'The State Apparatuses', and Chapter Six provides a conclusion. There are also historical updates about events in these three countries after the conclusion.

differences between the bourgeois and the exceptional state? As he sees it, the major difference lies in the balance of power that characterises each situation. Transitions arise out of crisis in each case. Social democratic states allow some change within their structure without the need for a revolution. But this is a capacity that the exceptional state does not have, because it does not have a mechanism by which fundamental change can occur. When the crisis comes in such a state, it is therefore much more significant.

Exceptional states come into being originally to solve a hegemonic crisis. This is now the familiar Gramscian line that Poulantzas is spinning, and he has used it several times.²⁸⁴ In his view, it is clearly a defining characteristic of the rise of exceptional states in general, whether they be Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain or Greece. In these conditions, the emerging state establishes a new balance of forces that protects a new hegemonic understanding. The new balance of forces usually requires there to be the dissolution of established political parties, elimination of the suffrage,²⁸⁵ a change and an expansion in the state apparatus, with the repressive elements coming to the fore, and so on. This creates a situation in which new elements of the power bloc come into play. It is the domestic bourgeoisie in this case, and this process develops by a series of stages, not in a linear fashion. He now restates his major theoretical point :

The state apparatus is not a thing or a structure that is in itself neutral, so that the configuration of class power only intervenes in the form of state power. The relations that characterise the state power also pervade the structure of its apparatus, the state being the condensation of forces. It is precisely this characteristic of the state, that it is a relation, and thus riven by class contradictions, that allots a role of their own to the state apparatuses and the agents involved in them, and enables them to play this role.²⁸⁶

This is a profoundly important definition, and it is one that he underscores here, having made only brief mention of it in the chapter on the popular masses.²⁸⁷ In his familiarly dense language, Poulantzas is trying to bring to life a sense of the state teeming with activity, conflict and energy, wrestling with the insoluble problems of class society, almost with a life of its own, with its own volition. Of course, nobody would go so far as to suggest that the state is somehow motivated by self-interest, that it has a separate life apart from society. Quite the contrary. In the Poulantzian world view, the state embodies classes, represents classes and their struggles, and condenses them into its structure in order to cement together irreconcilable social forces. But this is a very important shift from instrumentalism, and provides a much richer understanding of how class struggles, and perhaps the most important elements of class struggle, might occur within the ambit of the state structure, rather than outside in civil society. More cautiously, it certainly is the case that important elements of that struggle, though clearly not all of it in its many elements, can be structured within the walls of the state. This theoretical leap is one of the most important and influential moves that Poulantzas makes in the whole of his writing on the state.

This being the case, no simple transition is possible between one form of government and another. It isn't like driving a car – you don't just change drivers. The whole apparatus is infected by the particular shape of the class formations that characterised the previous régime, so any change will require a thorough reshaping of the state structure from top to bottom. The rigidity of the exceptional state is both its strength and its weakness. It provides the firm structures through which

²⁸⁴ CD, 92.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ CD, 92.

²⁸⁷ CD, page 82. He has set this idea earlier in *Political Power and Social Classes*.

much can be achieved, but it also suggest fragility, a structure, which, once fractured, may be subject to immediate transformation. Change, Poulantzas argues, is possible among elements, clans, fiefs of the power bloc – the various elements and fractions of the dominant classes can be altered and shifted without damaging the overall structure of the state. But when the popular masses do not respond and cannot be managed by violence, then a disruption of the state structure itself is inevitable.²⁸⁸ This appears clearly to be the case in Portugal, where progressive fractions of the army coalesced with certain elements of the popular uprising, perhaps less so in Greece, where certain sections of the military appear to have acted on their own.²⁸⁹ Poulantzas imagines that progressive elements of the Spanish army may lead the charge and that this might open the door to the popular masses. The existing state structures, characterised as they are with the old ways of doing things, must now go through a purging and cleansing process, not just to the way things are done, but by the replacement of personnel from top to bottom. But this process of purging continually meets resistance, a resistance that in the end results from this being a ‘partial’ change, since under both régimes, the bourgeoisie remain in power. This ‘democratization from above’ is quite different from a ‘democratization from below’²⁹⁰

Poulantzas now engages in a long exchange with ‘false analyses’ of the dictatorships. Two positions are taken to task – the view that the régimes would fall because of their own contradictions, and the alternative view that such contradictions did not exist, and that no such occurrence was possible.²⁹¹ In contrast, Poulantzas wants to argue that both in the case of the exceptional state and in the social democratic²⁹² state, the state apparatus acts as the party of the bourgeois class.²⁹³ But the state can also organize the popular classes, including workers and the petty bourgeoisie, thus bringing them into the structures that support the bourgeoisie. Thus every state is ‘riven with contradictions’,²⁹⁴ and thereby there is a source of discontent and uncertainty. For example, in each of the three dictatorships, a power bloc comprised of various fractions of the bourgeoisie was constituted. Military power was used to a greater or lesser extent in the various régimes and at different times. But in each case, these military apparatuses are themselves characterised by contradictions and conflicts. As the privileged element of the state under dictatorship, the military becomes the party of the bourgeoisie. Thus the conflicts that exist among the various bits and pieces of the bourgeoisie organised in the power bloc also come to be reflected in the military.²⁹⁵

Military dictatorships thus act as the ‘party’ of the bourgeois class, representing these interests within the structure of the state and beyond. And while social democracies are flexible, and can adapt to change, no such change is possible in the hierarchically structured military dictatorship.²⁹⁶ Poulantzas argues close ties remain between the military and the petty bourgeoisie, even though they play no major part in the structure of the régime, as was the case in Germany and Italy. But this does not lead to the absorption of this class into the state, but rather to the beginnings of resistance

²⁸⁸ *CD*, 95.

²⁸⁹ Poulantzas discusses these events on pages 95-96. Poulantzas wants to make the point, and does so at length, that the popular forces were important in the long-term in Greece, even if they were not central in the first instance. Given the changes that would be required to move from one form of the state to another, it is not surprising that the struggle is long and uncertain. The Spanish situation is, at the time of his writing, less certain and still undecided.

²⁹⁰ Poulantzas’s phrases, page 99.

²⁹¹ *CD*, pages 101-102.

²⁹² Poulantzas often uses the phrase ‘the parliamentary-democratic’ state to refer to social democracy.

²⁹³ *CD*, 103.

²⁹⁴ A phrase Poulantzas routinely uses, here on page 103.

²⁹⁵ *CD*, 106.

²⁹⁶ *CD*, 107

among certain members of the armed forces with the régimes themselves.²⁹⁷ Alliances can also be formed among members of the armed forces representing the domestic bourgeoisie, and these groups attached to the disaffected petty bourgeoisie. Herein lie the seeds of an insurrection.

Then Poulantzas draws two conclusions, the first very curious and not following at all from what has preceded it. He concludes that the popular masses can ally with elements of the military – this has not been argued in the text at all – quite the contrary.²⁹⁸ And then he confirms the splits that exist and develop within the military ranks. He avoids the simple separation of the higher ranks with the domestic bourgeoisie, and the lower ranks with the petty bourgeoisie. Working class people may find support at any level, though the picture is unclear. In such a state a condition of relative autonomy prevails in which the state keeps its distance from the various elements of the power bloc. Does the army rule to promote its own interests? Poulantzas thinks not.²⁹⁹ The army does take on an important ideological role, however. Nationalist ideology is at the forefront here. It can have a somewhat progressive character, placing the national interest against American interests, for example. Recently, in Greece and Portugal, a progressive nationalism seems to have appeared.³⁰⁰ Notions of national sovereignty have been exploited by the domestic bourgeoisie, and these claims have often coincided with claims by some in the military, the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. This nationalism can often be tainted by an anti-communism, which can make any simple alliance with the working class somewhat problematic.³⁰¹ This means, therefore, that the conflicts that appear in the political structure of the dictatorships then logically also flow very readily into the ideological state apparatuses, which are themselves in a confused condition. The church in Spain, for example, could be said to have split in two over the question of whether to support the oligarchy or not. In Greece, the orthodox church played no major role in the junta. The junta replaced the top leadership, but the lower ranks were always opposed to the new régime.³⁰²

At the higher ranks of the régime, the ideological focus moves from a nationalist emphasis towards a technologist and economic focus, thus aiming at industrialization and modernization as the antidote to the backwardness and poverty of the past. This led to an over-dependence on outside capital, and the further promotion of a dependency economy. But it was difficult to change the bureaucracy in the direction of the efficiencies required in the developing economy because of vested interests. The educational system also went through prodigious struggles. Already antiquated and deeply hierarchical, the dictatorships simply reinforced these structures. The judiciary resisted the imposition of a permanent military justice and tribunal system, and remained hostile to the emerging dictatorships. In the end, they came to be part of the struggle for freedom. Contradictions and ambiguities plagued the press, the trade unions and the state apparatuses.³⁰³ Poulantzas argues that

²⁹⁷ *CD*, 108.

²⁹⁸ Indeed on pages 108-109, he argues the case that in Portugal the AFM seeks to manage and control the working class, and not represent them. Indeed they are excluded from direct representation.

²⁹⁹ *CD*, 113. There is a rambling and incoherent tone to the discussion in these pages. The familiar numbering of sections appears again on page 112 and 113. The arguments do not come to a clear point, and the logic of the reasoning involved is faulty.

³⁰⁰ *CD*, 115.

³⁰¹ *CD*, 116.

³⁰² *CD*, 119.

³⁰³ Again the writing is indistinct and repetitive here. We have gathered the point that the dictatorships were riven with contradictions. It is not clear why this needs endlessly to be repeated.

having failed to incorporate the popular masses into the state structure, the régimes were unable to resist a mass uprising when it emerged.³⁰⁴

In his last section on the state apparatuses, Poulantzas wants to distinguish between these dictatorships and ‘fascism proper’.³⁰⁵ Under fascism, the party holds the social formation together, including the working class. Nothing like this party exists in the dictatorships. They do not manage change well as parties do in parliamentary-democratic regimes, and they don’t have the organizing power of the fascist parties. The contradictions within and between the various elements of the state apparatus make these régimes vulnerable. They lacked the charismatic power of a leader, and they were unable to hold their societies together.

In his conclusion, Poulantzas makes it clear that the emerging social democratic societies are anything but stable – he holds out the possibility of further changes from the left, especially in Portugal.³⁰⁶ He also asks – can these régimes fall back into dictatorship? Uncertainty and instability appears to be the defining quality of the new developing political systems, though we must remember that Poulantzas is writing just as these changes are occurring, and when things remain unclear and unfinished. Will the United States intervene to protect their interests? The bourgeois state system is, in his view, at something of a crisis point with the rise of political energy among the popular masses – a certain kind of democracy has already been superseded. He calls this new emerging phase of bourgeois democracy the ‘technocratic-authoritarian’ phase.³⁰⁷ In the three countries under consideration, it remains important to point out the dependent nature of these economies within Europe, and that they are thus developing dependent capitalist states, and that the ideological nature of these state will be more autocratic than elsewhere. We should be on our guard, Poulantzas warns, to ensure that these exceptional régimes do not re-emerge again, that we do not lapse back into dictatorships. In fact, we should use the crisis to move forward urgently into the transition to socialism, especially in Italy and France. We need to act :

If we confine ourselves to waiting, we will not get the ‘great day’, at all, but rather the tanks in the small hours of the morning.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ *CD*, 124. The argument is shaky here again. It is clear that the dictatorships did not fall because of mass uprisings, so the conclusion is beside the point.

³⁰⁵ *CD*, 124-126.

³⁰⁶ *CD*, 127.

³⁰⁷ *CD*, 130.

³⁰⁸ *CD*, 133. Poulantzas is not ready to leave his contemporary account of fascism there. The first draft of the book is dated ‘February, 1975’, but he then adds additional material covering March 1975 to June 1976, in which he provides details of very recent events in Portugal. Again, he asks whether a transition to socialism is possible – he is living through these events as they occur, and they could not be more urgent to discuss. In fact, on page 136, he dismisses the possibility of socialism in Portugal. The working class could not organize sufficiently, and, in the end, though external intervention might have happened, it was internal factors that predominated. ‘Bourgeois power was never dislodged’ he comments on page 141. A lack of a mass revolutionary party was crucial. He concludes that we learn from all this of the relative autonomy of the political superstructure in relation to class struggle. (143) Socialism was never really on the agenda. But 50% of all capital was nationalized (144), agrarian reform took place, a substantial improvement in the standard of living occurred, and other improvements happened. He then reviews the various elements of the left in the transformation. He goes on to turn his attention to Spain. (pages 155ff.) He repeats what has already been said above – that military régimes are incapable of reforming themselves. Franco is dead, but no clear path forward has presented itself. The extreme right wing is still strong, the domestic bourgeoisie is struggling with a reformist strategy but so far unsuccessfully. And finally, the state remains relatively autonomous, and resists change. There are thus many elements of the situation that will prevent change. The left, though, are now strong. Thus democracy seems inevitable in the end. In Greece, there exists a ‘process of relatively stable democratization under the hegemony and direction of the domestic bourgeoisie’. (159) Greece has attained a parliamentary democracy. The state apparatus has, to a large extent, been

4. Reimagining the State : *Political Power and Social Classes*

Poulantzas began his interest in the state through a study of law, and his doctoral thesis examined the theoretical and moral questions surrounding the judicial system. Here's what Poulantzas said about this thesis :

My doctoral thesis was undertaken in the philosophy of law, in which I tried to develop a conception of law drawing on Goldmann and Lukács. It was published in 1964; but from the moment it was published I began to feel the limitations of that orientation within Marxism. At this time I began to encounter Gramsci through *Critica Marxista* which was the most important journal of Marxism at that time.³⁰⁹

Very soon afterwards, and strongly influenced by Gramsci,³¹⁰ Poulantzas began to work on his extraordinarily important major work on the state, in which he reinvented our conception of how the state might work under capitalism.

Political Power and Social Classes exploded onto the theoretical and political scene in 1968, weeks before the May insurrection in Paris, and changed our broad understanding of the state forever. It constitutes a re-imagination of state structure and activity. It is a massively ambitious undertaking for a young scholar to attempt. In it, he not only proposes a complete revolution in state theory, but also, as a preliminary task, sets out to reshape class theory as a whole, taking on vast areas of political and theoretical certainties. In its wake, the book upturned a huge array of agreed understandings that had underpinned the political life of the left for decades. In the first 180 pages, he sets out the problem to be tackled, and in the last half of the book, he develops alternatives.³¹¹

Where else would he start this revision but with Marx? In the introduction, he reminds us of the difference between the 'science of history' (historical materialism) and Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism), which have different objects. 'HM' studies history, and 'DM' studies knowledge. Marxism provides the tools to study history, but overall it emphasizes the distinction between processes of thought and real processes, arguing for the primacy of the real over the 'knowledge of the real'.³¹² Then he sets out his project in clear terms :

purged, and the old leaders brought to justice. He speaks again now of the emergence of a new autocratic bourgeois state. New compromises are being established with comprador capital. (159) The parties of the left remain weak, leading to a 'crisis of representation'. (160) There are deep divisions among the left, both among the socialist movements, and especially among the communist party elements. This is where his heart lies, since he was an active member of the Interior Party, and it is where the book finishes. The Poulantzas clique strove for independence from Moscow. The splits on the left have only helped to secure bourgeois domination over the new state.

³⁰⁹ From 'Interview with Nicos Poulantzas', by Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt, *Marxism Today*, July 1979, page 194. The thesis was published as *Nature des Choses et Droit: essai sur la dialectique du fait et de la valeur* (NDC), Paris: R. Pichon et R. Durand-Avzias, in 1965, according to Jessop, and 1964 according to Poulantzas himself. It appears Jessop is right. The Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence cites 1965 as the publishing date.

³¹⁰ Poulantzas comments about this shift : 'At this time I began to encounter Gramsci through *Critica Marxista* which was the most important journal of Marxism at that time. I began also to work with Althusser, while still being influenced - as I always am - by Gramsci - which created a kind of agreement and disagreement, from the beginning, with Althusser'. (*Marxism Today*, op. cit., page 194)

³¹¹ In many ways, this is too simplistic a model, but it gives the reader something to use as a signpost. Actually, Poulantzas argues with established thinking throughout the book, but his own original voice becomes stronger and stronger as the book develops, as one might anticipate.

³¹² *Political Power and Social Classes*, New Left Books and Sheed and Ward, 1975, and Verso edition, 1978, London. First published in Paris by Francis Maspero in 1968. Page 12.

Theoretical work, then, whatever the degree of its abstraction, is always work bearing on real processes. Yet since this work produces knowledge, it is wholly situated in the process of thought : no concepts are more real than others. Theoretical work proceeds from a *raw material*, which consists not only of the ‘real-concrete’, but of information, notions, etc. about this reality, and deals with it *by means of certain conceptual tools*: the result of this work is the *knowledge* of an object.

It can be said that, in the strong sense of the term, only *real, concrete, singular* objects exist. The final aim of the process of thought is knowledge of these objects ...³¹³

Poulantzas is setting out his philosophical methodology here,³¹⁴ and the details of this section need not concern us here in any detail. But it is important to note the close attention Poulantzas pays to the methodological struggles that were happening in Marxist intellectual circles at this time. He begins by talking about the nature of social formations, by which he means society as a whole. In any given society, a variety of modes of production can be said to exist – the capitalist mode of production (CMP) the feudal, the patriarchal – and in each society, one mode of production can be said to dominate.³¹⁵ Together these modes of production form a structured unity. This matrix³¹⁶ of modes of production constitutes the object of study. The situation is complicated by the existence of various economic, political, ideological and theoretical factors. In societies dominated by the CMP, the economic dimension tends to be determinate.

We are met immediately in the very first pages, as we have been elsewhere, by Poulantzas’s taxonomic fury. In this instance, he is not content to set out theoretical requirements for studying actual societies – here he is keen to establish a form of science in general before he develops an appropriate theoretical apparatus to examine the state :

The object of this book is *the political*, in particular the political superstructure of the state in the CMP : that is the production of the concepts of this region in this mode, and the production of more concrete concepts dealing with politics in capitalist formations.³¹⁷

We can expect, therefore, a series of theoretical productions, of products, much like the products of capitalism itself, to spew forth in the coming pages, that will help us understand what is happening in the politics of modern capitalist societies, and in particular, how the state functions. The logic of this process flows from the abstract to the concrete, and the aim is to produce concepts that explain the real-concrete elements of a given society. Such concepts allow us to know the world as it is.³¹⁸

He proposes to begin his work by examining the existing work in the Marxist classics, in the present writings on the state, the writings from the workers’ movements and other similar sources. These constitute the present understandings of the state, and they comprise the raw materials on which he plans to work. In this process, he has had to rewrite and complete the Marxist classics in some

³¹³ *PPSC*, 12-13.

³¹⁴ The argument is more complicated than the one I am describing. For example, the distinction between real concrete objects and the discussion about them is uncertain, and we may better think of a range of situations between the two. (*PPSC*, page 13ff.) Much of this philosophical work comes from Althusser, under whose influence Poulantzas came at this time, though he was never a student of Althusser, and soon broke away from this relationship. This break, and especially the break with Balibar, is discussed more fully in the *Marxism Today* interview cited above.

³¹⁵ *PPSC*, 15.

³¹⁶ He insists on the use of the term ‘matrix’. Page 15.

³¹⁷ *PPSC*, 16.

³¹⁸ On page 18, he sets out in diagrammatic form the way in which this method of moving from the abstract to the concrete might work.

instances.³¹⁹ He sees a lack of theoretical certainty and systematic treatment in many of these classical works when it comes to the political realm.

The epistemological break in Marx's work is noted. This is the familiar claim that Althusser makes in arguing that the young Marx took an idealist position, and later, in certain key works, began to establish a new science, to open up a new continent of thinking. The 'Young Marx', heavily under the influence of Hegel and of Feuerbach, is said to have been predominantly humanist,³²⁰ and the reason that this becomes an important theme at the time of Poulantzas's writing is because, in the wake of the end of Stalinism, there was renewed interest within Marxist circles in the work of the Young Marx, with his emphasis on personal freedom, the concept of alienation, and the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism under the banner of socialist humanism. Althusser takes this to be a retrogressive move, allowing Marxist enemies to turn the tables on Marxism itself. Apparently, in the historical moment after World War Two, when Althusser was coming of age, and beginning to write, the class struggle was imagined to be over, upturned by the catastrophe of world war, and all was now, for the moment at least, peace and light – a kumbaya moment.³²¹ What especially seemed to be in error to Althusser was the mindless getting together after the war of various apparently progressive groups – socialists, democrats, communists – all brought under the banner of a benign movement towards a new society. While this all sounds very charming and lovely, it was a delusional strategy from the Althusserian point of view. The 'old' period of Stalinism has been replaced with the 'new', much more exciting, far less dogmatic, and impressively more attractive version of Communism, all this undergirded by new readings of the Young Marx.

What is Althusser to say to all this? He reminds us that this deviation from Marxist science has occurred many times in the past, and that Lenin and others have often commented on the problem.³²² He reminds us quite simply, that it is an ideological illusion :

... the inflation of the themes of 'Marxist humanism' and their encroachment on Marxist theory should be interpreted as a possible historical symptom of a double inability and a double danger. An inability to think the specificity of Marxist theory, and, correlatively, a revisionist danger of confusing it with pre-Marxist ideological interpretations. An inability to resolve the real (basically *political* and *economic*) problems posed ... , and a danger of masking these problems with the false 'solution' of some merely *ideological* formulae.³²³

Althusser then makes a very bold claim, on which most of his intellectual reputation was to depend in the coming years :

³¹⁹ He is nothing if not confident. See his comments on page 19.

³²⁰ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Introduction. 1963. In the comments to English readers, Althusser explains that the essays that are to follow have their limitations : 'They are *philosophical* essays, the first stages of a long-term investigation, preliminary results which obviously demand correction; this investigation concerns the specific nature of the principles of the science and philosophy founded by Marx'. From 'To My English Readers', page nine. This comment raises a problem besetting much of this period's writing from the left – that everything was 'preliminary', and subject to revision. Nothing was ever fully explained. All was a preliminary to something else, but a final understanding never resulted. It was as if the writing was enough. Althusser, of course, wants to insist otherwise, this his writings are an 'intervention in a particular conjuncture', and in his case the direction of the French Communist Party.

³²¹ Defined by the Urban Dictionary as 'blandly pious and naively optimistic.' Recovered on October 21, 2016 at <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=kumbaya>.

³²² Pages 10-11.

³²³ Pages 11-12. Althusser's writing, like that of Poulantzas, is full of urgency and vitality. These are problems of the moment, and the writing is seen as being able to inject new life into the political world surrounding the authors.

... we may claim that Marx established a new *science*: the science of the history of 'social formations'. To be more precise, I should say that Marx 'opened up' for scientific knowledge a new 'continent', that of *history* – just as Thales opened up the 'continent' of mathematics for scientific knowledge, and Galileo opened up the 'continent' of physical nature for scientific knowledge.³²⁴

What we must do, then, quite clearly, is to rush back to the secure territory of Marxist science, and away from the easy solutions of the charming, but misguided, early Marx. What then, is the nature of this 'mature science'? The break between the two starts to be seen, according to Poulantzas, in *The German Ideology*³²⁵, but reaches its full realization in *Das Capital*. Poulantzas, quite clearly influenced by Althusser and writing in his wake, plans not to focus on the young Marx, but rather to concentrate on this new continent, to work in the established territory of historical materialism.

From *Capital*, Poulantzas decides he can find a 'scientific treatment of the CMP',³²⁶ and the matrix that specifies it, along with a scientific treatment of the economic system. The economy dominates, but the elements of the social formation have some autonomy one from another. For Poulantzas, a gap exists, even in the great master-work, in which, to his eye, the political world is implied rather than spoken about, and he plans to remedy the situation. Nor is ideology given a full analysis here. Then, in addition, there are other works by Marx, mostly focusing on 'ideological struggles', in which Marx is responding to critics. There are also a series of texts that focus on the real-concrete. Theory here is not explicitly stated. Instead these studies 'are a 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation' '.³²⁷ A key question here is whether concepts used in a specific study have usefulness in the analysis of capitalism in general. And do writings about one mode of production have value in analyzing other modes of production? How general are these concepts – at what level should they be used?³²⁸

Poulantzas then sets out his expositional strategy. Following Marx, he proposes to start with the concept of the political in general, then proceed to a regional political theory before finally arriving at the concrete-real. His products, as we have already found out, are to be new concepts by which to analyze the concrete-real. He thus starts in the realm of dialectical materialism, and will gradually introduced the theory of historical materialism.³²⁹ There are precautions to be taken. He does not expect to be entirely systematic, and he wants to avoid some obvious mistakes :

... I should like to note my reserve towards a currently over-popular tendency to put the cart before the horse in confusing the order of research and investigation with the logical order of the process of thought, and in systematizing the general theory in the void, before proceeding to a sufficient amount of concrete research : a tendency against which Marx warned us.³³⁰

His focus will be on the political within capitalism, and he does not plan to use these evolving concepts in wider areas, such as in the study of other modes of production. The fundamental concepts from historical materialism which come into play are those deriving from the theory of

³²⁴ Althusser, page 14. In the introduction to *For Marx*, Althusser sets out a very clear chronology in Marx's work, setting the date for the 'break' in 1845. Here is his chronology in brief. Pre-1844 – the Young Marx ; the Break 1845 ; 1845-1957, the transitional period ; after 1857, (1857-1883) the Mature Period.

³²⁵ *PPSC*, 20.

³²⁶ *PPSC*, 20.

³²⁷ *PPSC*, 22.

³²⁸ Poulantzas raises these questions on pages 22-23.

³²⁹ *PPSC*, 23-26.

³³⁰ *PPSC*, 24. Indeed Marx warned against such a strategy, but it is unclear whether Poulantzas will avoid the problem.

surplus value – the labourer ; the means of production ; the non-labourer, who appropriates the product.³³¹ These elements are brought into a relationship by capitalism, in which the labourer is separated from the products he makes. In this relationship, Poulantzas argues, quoting Marx, lies the entire secret of the social formation.³³² Marx goes on to comment :

... the economic structure of society is the real basis on which the juridical and political superstructure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond ; that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political and intellectual life generally, all this is very true for our times ...³³³

This is a profoundly important extract from Marx's writing, because it establishes the centrality of the base-superstructure model, in which it is thought that the economic life of a society determines the other elements of the world – the political and juridical system, as well as the dominating ideas of the day. This is an assertion that leads to endless debates about the determinacy of this relationship. If this relationship is determinate, then the nature of the state and the ideology of a given time can simply be read directly from the nature of the economic system. The state is then the mere instrument of the ruling class, and the ideology is ruling class ideology. But we already know this is precisely the misreading of Marx on which Poulantzas will concentrate in the pages to come. In any case, this is not the element in the quotation on which he wishes to concentrate. Instead, he uses it to show us that the capitalist mode of production is merely one moment in history, and that these relationships do not hold for all historical periods.

But then immediately he draws attention to other elements of Marx's writing that provide an avenue to a more sophisticated understanding of the major elements of capitalism.³³⁴ The economic and the political, he finds, both from the *Grundrisse*³³⁵ and from other sections of *Capital*, have a certain degree of relative autonomy between them – they are not joined together at the hip. Thus immediately we are disabused of the view that Marx developed some simple and unchanging view of the matter. If this new understanding is examined closely, it then becomes possible to study the political as a separate entity, a 'specific object of science'.³³⁶ Under capitalism, a specific form of economic relationship is set up in which the labourer is separated from his product, a situation that occurs most obviously with the rise of heavy industry.³³⁷ The economic system gains its character from this development, but it also creates a separation between the economic and political worlds, in which the economic realm, none the less, takes the dominant and determining role. This new understanding opens the door for what is to come.

Having cleared his throat, Poulantzas is now ready to get down to work on the raw materials of the task at hand – the existing writings concerning politics.³³⁸ Class struggle is clearly going to be at the centre of this work. Without class struggle, no politics. Without politics, no state. In a review of the best of the raw materials to hand – writings from Marx, Engels and Lenin - he draws out key

³³¹ PPSC, 26.

³³² PPSC, 27. Poulantzas is quoting a passage from *Capital*, volume 3, page 791.

³³³ Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, page 82, quoted in PPSC, 28.

³³⁴ PPSC, 29ff.

³³⁵ Marx, Karl, translated by Martin Nicolaus. 1973. *Grundrisse : Foundations of the critique of political economy*. New York: Vintage Books.

³³⁶ PPSC, 29.

³³⁷ PPSC, 32-33.

³³⁸ PPSC, 37.

elements of the Marxist readings on politics.³³⁹ Marxism can be read as a historicism, history through class struggle driving society forward. Politics through class struggle is the motive power through history, and linear progress is made in this fashion. All the elements are thrown together, and nothing exists in the world of ideas except the distinction between bourgeois science and proletarian science.³⁴⁰ This clumsy synthesis of all the elements of society makes the separate study of the political impossible.³⁴¹

Historicism and functionalism are closely aligned. Poulantzas seems to be assigning this whole tradition, from Weber through Parsons (though Weber is rarely treated as a functionalist) as historicist, and thus rather beside the point.³⁴² Althusser has shown that the theory of historical materialism can allow us to escape from a simple historicism that offers class struggle as the singular motor of history.³⁴³ Althusser's characterisation reminds us of the complexity and the nuances of the social formation, and thus the impossibility of attaching the causes of history to a single source. Indeed, following Lenin, we can discern that every social conjuncture (a society at a given time) has within it various elements on which political practice and class struggle impinge – the economic, ideological, theoretical and political.³⁴⁴ Political structures are to be found in the *institutionalised power of the state*.³⁴⁵ Class struggle is always aimed at the state. If the final aim of class struggle is the gaining of power, and if the state is where power resides, the goal of class struggle is therefore always to take control of the state.

The state may be said to be the factor of cohesion in any given society.³⁴⁶ During class struggle, the goal is to develop a new equilibrium in the state structure. The state is where contradictions are condensed. If we see the state in this way, a major problem presently existing in Marxist theory can be resolved.³⁴⁷ In the early Marx, we find the argument that the purpose of class struggle is to gain control of civil society, and not the state. In the mature Marx, the goal of class struggle is the state, and the problem is overcome. Under capitalism, the state has some degree of autonomy. Only by developing a degree of autonomy can the state hope to achieve its goal as the factor of social cohesion.³⁴⁸ Engels had apparently presaged this argument by speaking of the way in which the state

³³⁹ In fact, he starts with Hegel and Gramsci, who he does not list in the text. And like Althusser, he is using the classical model of production to frame his argument. All production starts with raw materials – in this case existing concepts. These concepts are then worked upon to produce new concepts, new knowledge. The structure of the argument perfectly parallels the theory of surplus value set out by Marx many years before.

³⁴⁰ An argument developed by Bukharin and others, and developed, and later rejected, by Althusser.

³⁴¹ Functionalism and Talcott Parsons are cited as providing the only viable alternative to the Marxist account of history.

³⁴² *PPSC*, page 40ff. But having said he will spend some time on this issue, he immediately veers back to Althusser and Lenin.

³⁴³ *PPSC*, 41.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Poulantzas is also engaged, in footnotes and in the text, with an endless attempt to create new definitions and new clarity about existing definitions, the familiar taxonomic fury we have seen elsewhere. For example, on page 42, footnote 8, he wants to distinguish between the law (the juridical structure) and the state, (the political structure) and not to confuse the two as the 'juridico-political structure of the state', a commonly used term in the classics. A most important distinction, one might argue, and precisely in line with his broad task of putting the record straight with regard to the classic texts of Marxism. But often these definitional skirmishes lead to dead ends, to the creation of new concepts that neither he nor anyone else ever uses again.

³⁴⁵ *PPSC*, 42. His phrase and his italics.

³⁴⁶ *PPSC*, 44.

³⁴⁷ *PPSC*, 45-46.

³⁴⁸ Poulantzas further, and appropriately, complicates the picture on page 47 by reminding us that even when one mode of production has gained dominance, several other modes of production still exist in the same social formation.

connects with the array of conflicts in society as a whole. One part of the Engels quote that Poulantzas cites is well worth repeating here :

... it becomes necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate ... conflict, and keep it within the bounds of 'order' ; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.³⁴⁹

This notion of the state as comprising the 'table of contents of man's practical conflicts'³⁵⁰ is also to be found in Lenin, so the idea is clearly there among the classical writers. This being the case, it is perhaps within the structure of the state that we can look for an understanding of society as a whole. The state, then, both reflects society and its troubles, as well as offering a method of achieving order :

The state prevents classes and 'society' from consuming themselves : the use of the term 'society' indicates that it prevents the social formation from bursting apart. It is true that the Marxist classics did not theoretically elaborate this conception of the state, but we do find numerous indications of it in their works.³⁵¹

Poulantzas has thus cleverly achieved two goals in this section. He has drawn from the classic writings sufficient evidence of the notion of the state as the institution of social order, but also provided himself with an opportunity to complete the work only superficially begun, hinted at, and dimly conceived, by the great masters who wrote before him.

This notion of order that the state manages can take many forms, and in the next section Poulantzas spells out the forms it can take. What, then, are the precise functions of the state? A related question is to ask where the state originated. According to the classics, the state's traditional role is to control the economic life of society.³⁵² But the labour process is only one aspect of the economic system that the state must control. It must also seek to manage the juridical system that provides rules for the work place and capitalist markets. And it must also provide an ideological system that fits the overall structure of the economic system as well. Thus the state must function at the economic, ideological and political levels simultaneously if the economic system is to be sustained. And the state's various activities can only be properly understood if we can see the connectedness between these elements of the system.³⁵³ The result is political class domination with the overall aim of establishing and maintaining unity and order. Thus the state's political function is paramount inasmuch as the primary role of the state is to ensure the political domination of a certain class. But the state's functions cannot be reduced to the simple act of intervention since it provides an ensemble of functions well beyond simple intervention. It does not, therefore, simply produce order. And the role that it plays varies in different societies.

³⁴⁹ Cited in *PPSC*, page 48. The original source is cited as *Origins of the Family*, Chapter 9, *MESW*, 1970, page 576. A delightful quote from Marx is also worth recording here, though it adds little to the general argument : 'The State is the official résumé of society'. (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, page 156. Appendix : Marx's letter to P.V. Annenkov, 1846.)

³⁵⁰ Lenin, 'What the "Friends of the People" are and how they fight the Social Democrats', *Collected Works*, Volume 3, page 527, and cited in *PPSC*, page 49.

³⁵¹ *PPSC*, 50.

³⁵² *PPSC*, 52. A further outburst of definitional analysis occurs in footnote 28 on this page, in which Poulantzas discusses 'some problems of *definition* set by *political anthropology* ...' (his italics)

³⁵³ *PPSC*, 53.

Poulantzas now turn to the issue of politics and social classes.³⁵⁴ *Capital*, he argues, is a text focused on the economic dimension, but it does not provide an adequate account of the notion of class.³⁵⁵ We know already what is to come – the extension of the concept of social classes beyond the merely economic, and into the realms of the political and the ideological, and then further on into the very structure of the state itself. Again, we will see Poulantzas hint that these matters were there in part in the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but that the explanations are partial and in need of completion.³⁵⁶ In his discussion of Marx, he examines Marx's theory of the rise of the proletariat, and the emergence of a broadly political dimension beyond the singular exchange of worker and owner, or a single workplace and a single employer, and onto a wider stage. He is discussing the gradual rise of two social classes. Individuals struggling one with another do not constitute a struggle between social classes. Only the rise of groups – workers and bourgeoisie – provide the foundation for a struggle between classes, between categories of people, rather than between individuals. So what was once a 'merely' economic struggle in the workplace becomes a political struggle in society at large.³⁵⁷

In the Poulantzian view, this argument has frequently been distorted, and these distortions must be swept to one side. 'The first argument to be dismissed is the Hegel-inspired conclusion that 'men make their own history.' It is as if this movement of class formation, from 'class-in-itself' to 'class-for-itself' is logical, coherent and inevitable. There are also functionalist interpretations to be discarded.³⁵⁸ The problem here is that structures and functions are seen as two parts of the definition of social class – class situation and class function – which neatly attaches to Marx's class-in-itself and class-for-itself. Such a view is misguided because Marx imagined that workers and bourgeoisie 'bear' the ensemble of structures of a class society, and because Marx never conceived classes as the origins of structures. Thus the connections made between class situation and class function are misplaced.

A further error to be corrected is to found in economism. In this view, classes merely have an economic status. But the economic can never be separated from the political and ideological dimensions. Marx, Poulantzas argues,³⁵⁹ never made such an argument, though it is claimed that he did. Instead Marx always spoke of the '*ensemble of the structures of a mode of production*'.³⁶⁰ Classes can always be identified at the economic, political and economic level. This leads us to reconsider the notion of the social relations of production. The idea of relations of production refers to how people are organized in the productive process – worker and capitalist, for example. But it is

³⁵⁴ Chapter two, pages 57-99. This still comes under the heading of general questions to be raised, which involves a rehearsing of existing texts. This continues to page 117. He raises three sets of questions – questions about the political, questions about politics and social classes, and questions about power.

³⁵⁵ When one steps back for a moment, the ambition of the writer is made clear. *Capital* might be a masterwork, but it does not provide an adequate *Marxist* account of social classes. And who, exactly, apart from Marx, could provide that?

³⁵⁶ See, for example, his discussion of Lenin's writings on the political on page 58, and his detailed discussion of Marx's economic theory on pages 58-59.

³⁵⁷ This discussion takes place on page 59. The familiar distinction of class-in-itself (an objective class) and class-for-itself (a class conscious of its objective position) is set out here. Of course, many writers, and notably Foucault, would later argue that political elements are immediately there at the first, in the first exchange between worker and manager.

³⁵⁸ *PPSC*, 61. He includes Bourdieu in this second group of functionalists, whose theory of class is extensive and different. See 'Bourdieu's Class' in *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: the Practice of Theory*, (edited with Richard Harker and Cheleen Mahar), Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire. Published in the United States by St. Martin's Press, New York, 1990. Japanese edition released in 1993.

³⁵⁹ *PPSC*, 63.

³⁶⁰ *PPSC*, 63, italics in the original.

necessary to distinguish the *social* relations of production if we want to go further and examine the other levels of the class structure – the political, the ideological, the cultural. It seems a trivial distinction, but as Poulantzas builds towards a new theory of social classes, it is very significant. Classes are always engaged in social practices, and these practices cannot be reduced to structures.³⁶¹

So what can we conclude so far about the nature of classes? Clearly classes cannot simply be distinguished just at the economic level alone – economic, political and ideological levels come into play from the first, both in the social practices of classes, and in the struggles that take place between them. Indeed the dominance of the economic in class struggle may be displaced into the political and ideological realms. The economic may be determinant ‘in the last instance’, but classes cannot be reduced merely to the sphere of economic activity.

Do Marx and Engels admit that classes have a ‘plurality of criteria’? Certainly Marxist critics have suggested that this is so. Clearly *Capital* proposes two classes – wage-earning labourers and capitalists. But any society comprises several modes of production, and if this is the case, other classes besides the two capitalist classes must be said to exist. But the political and ideological dimensions of even these two central classes are not fully elaborated upon in the classical texts, though clearly these elements are close at hand, as in the case of property law and of labour law.³⁶²

Thus it is mistaken to argue that in the capitalist mode of production, that economic relations are sufficient to define class relations. There are also secondary effects to consider which derive from the concrete situation in any given society. And where does politics figure in these theoretical calculations? Marx appears to separate economic struggles from political struggles, and suggest that classes exist only at the level of political struggle – the familiar class-in-itself/class-for-itself distinction. The early work of Marx is clearly representative of such a view. But it seems equally clear that class relations are embedded in economic relations in *Capital* and later writings. And this insistence by Marx on defining classes solely on the political plane needs to be explained. What seems to be happening is that we are witnessing the gradual formation of a theoretical concept which comes to light when we study Marx’s texts historically. He is also attempting to separate the various levels of class practices out so as to be able to distinguish them theoretically.³⁶³ But what remains important is to remind ourselves that these structures comprise elements of a united structure which come together in the actual practices of social classes in any given society.

Classes are said to exist, by some of Marx’s critics,³⁶⁴ merely at the political level when they become conscious together as a class. Classes in this view don’t exist at the economic level ; they come into being at the political and ideological levels merely in the act of class struggle. This approach suggests that the economic system is thereby ‘shaken up from above’.³⁶⁵ This is a misguided view, according to Poulantzas, and he proposes instead the importance of class struggle at each level of the social system, including the economic. It might be said, somewhat differently, that the political class struggle is the *over-determining* level of the class struggle at certain times, especially because the state is involved, and because the state acts as the force of social cohesion.

³⁶¹ See footnote 16 on page 68.

³⁶² *PPSC*, 71.

³⁶³ *PPSC*, 75.

³⁶⁴ Poulantzas cites Lukàcs, Korsch and ‘the Theoretical Leftism of the Third International’ as supporting this line of argument. See page 76. This argument is set out in detail.

³⁶⁵ Lenin’s phrase, cited by Poulantzas, page 76. Original citation is ‘Once again on the Trade Unions ...’, op. cit.

How are classes present in any given society?³⁶⁶ Classes which seem theoretically to be present in any particular mode of production appear *dissolved and diffused*³⁶⁷ in any given concrete situation. When one mode of production dominates, classes from other modes of production may be less clearly demarcated, especially if we consider that classes might be said to exist only when political class struggles representing their interests take place. But we should perhaps more accurately argue that classes exist only when their economic interests come to be represented at the political level. How exactly, then, are we able to distinguish when a class exists or not? Poulantzas introduces the phrase *pertinent effects* to suggest how this might be done.³⁶⁸ By this term he means that an economic class produces effects in the political, ideological and social structures and practices that would not exist if the economic class did not exist. Economic classes can clearly exist without a political form of representation that speaks for their economic interests. For example, in the case of French peasants, it is clear the rise of the Bonapartist state would not have occurred without them, and thus they are represented by the very structure of the state itself. In this way, they can be said to comprise a social force. In any event, even when the state does not represent such a category, and this category does not have party representation, issue like the suffrage mean that no such group can be overlooked – there are always ‘pertinent effects’ at the political level. However, this situation must lead us to the view that without state or party representation, such a category cannot be said to exist as a separate social class.³⁶⁹ Thus if an economic category never functions as a social force, it cannot be said to form a separate element in the class structure. Thus a class must have pertinent effects, but that does not mean it must have its own political party to constitute a class.

In any given society, certain modes of production can be said to be decomposing, their classes shifting into new class formations. As these changes occur, the way a class is represented at the political level is also shifting, as new class alliances and new class fractions are formed.³⁷⁰ It then become important to say more about classes, strata and categories.³⁷¹ *Social categories* are ‘social ensembles with pertinent effects’, such as the bureaucracy and the intellectuals. *Autonomous fractions of classes* are those fractions which might lead to social forces, become autonomous and create ‘pertinent effects’. And *social strata* are the sub-elements (what Poulantzas calls the ‘secondary effects of the combination of modes of production in a social formation’) of classes, such as the ‘labour aristocracy’.³⁷² Obscurity and uncertainty in the use of these terms has prevailed among Marxist writers, apparently, and these confusions must be clarified and put to one side. If we step back somewhat from the obscurity of Poulantzas’s own argument, some of his intention comes more fully into focus. The bourgeoisie clearly have class fractions – the commercial, industrial and financial fractions can empirically be distinguished – groups joined together by common interests of ownership, but separated because of their several and various forms of activity. However, when the distinctions are purely political, things become more complicated. For example, the bureaucracy is determined not by economic factors, as in the case of the bourgeoisie, but by the political

³⁶⁶ This question is posed on page 77.

³⁶⁷ His phrase and italics, page 77.

³⁶⁸ *PPSC*, page 79. Poulantzas then uses the example of peasants described in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* as an example of how this process occurs.

³⁶⁹ *PPSC*, page 80.

³⁷⁰ *PPSC*, 82-82.

³⁷¹ Another example of the taxonomic fury that characterizes this book in particular, pages 84-85. Italics used in my text appear in the original. Whether all these sub-categories will be useful in what is to come is a matter of uncertainty.

³⁷² This seems clear enough. But then Poulantzas gives two further examples which further muddy the waters – the ‘summits’ of bureaucracy’ (which might still make sense) but also ‘fractions’ – entirely unclear.

dimension. Fractions might be able to constitute social forces, unlike strata, who are already embedded in a particular class. And even if this does not occur, various subgroups in society might still influence the political structure.

After this long discursus, Poulantzas is now ready to draw two conclusions : the separation between structures (the economic dimension) and (political and ideological) class practices ; and the argument that :

Social relations consist of class practices, in which social classes are placed in *oppositions* : social classes can be conceived only as class practices, these practices existing in oppositions *which, in their unity, constitute the field of class struggle*.³⁷³

Just as Poulantzas has just commented that one way to read Marx is to view his collected works historically, and thus to witness the gradual emergence of ‘mature’ concepts, so too as Poulantzas reads the classical texts, he responds to difficulties and omissions by trying to tidy up and clarify theoretical muddles, creating a flood of categories, definitions and specifications which appear to constitute a history of his own theoretical development. Many ideas are cast to one side, signposts to a theoretical dead end. Others appear to have more lasting power, and continue into the final understandings of the state. But often the relentless insistence on theoretical clarity ironically adds to the confusion, rather than simplifies the task.

Social classes are thus social relations, and these comprise class practices. Classes only exist in opposition. They imply domination and subordination – the struggle between wages and profits – for example. This analysis of classes as social relationships engaged in struggle leads to the development of new concepts. Structures do not dissolve into practices, however.

In Lenin we find a distinction between political and economic class struggles. Economic struggle for Lenin occurs around the workplace and in the trade unions, whereas political struggle is centred on the state.³⁷⁴ Poulantzas wants then to make a bold claim :

This distinction implies a *relation* between the economic and the political struggles. The essential character of this relationship consists in the fact that the political struggle is the *over-determining* level of the class struggle, in that it *concentrates* the levels of the class struggle.³⁷⁵

It then follows that rather than thinking of class struggle as an evolutionary phenomenon, it must rather be the case that the political struggle must always have priority. This is potentially a massive shift in Marxist thinking, which according to orthodoxy, always gives priority to the economic. Clearly Poulantzas is giving preference to Lenin’s thinking here, who proposes that unless a revolutionary class pays attention to politics, they will not survive, and one is tempted to think that there may be a situation in the revolutionary moment which deserves this focus, but that it may not be quite so pertinent during other historical times.³⁷⁶ And political struggle must then reach into the other areas of activity, the economic and the ideological, for example, even if the purpose of this struggle must always be, in the end, state power.

³⁷³ *PPSC*, page 86.

³⁷⁴ *PPSC*, 91-92.

³⁷⁵ *PPSC*, 92. The italics are in the original. As usual, Poulantzas uses italics to emphasize key points.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

Placing the primary emphasis on the political brings the state to the fore in a way rarely seen beyond Lenin, and clearly not fully realized in his writings. This leads Poulantzas now to consider ‘the conjuncture’ – the present moment – the actual conditions of a given society. He now turns to Lenin’s discussion of the Russian situation during the revolution. This conjuncture comprises a variety of social classes and categories, including the Tsarist régime, the monarchical bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the peasants.³⁷⁷ This is where the political class struggle occurs. We must examine the relationship between structures and practices here, and this connection is complex. Political struggle takes place within the limits set by the structures, and indeed can be said to take place on the structures.³⁷⁸

The structure of the state is especially important in this situation because it concentrates the levels of the structure. According to Lenin, the state must be smashed.³⁷⁹ If this is so, it is clear we must move beyond economic analysis. Only classes or class fractions which have pertinent effects can be said to be social forces. According to Lenin, they must go further, and declare their action, and participate in the struggle. And this struggle must take on the form of organised class power,³⁸⁰ which is often, though not always, associated with a political party.

Poulantzas now turns to the concept of power itself.³⁸¹ Again Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci are found wanting, never having produced between them a theoretical concept of power. Clearly this is the topic on the agenda here. First and foremost, power resides in the realm of class practices, and class relations are relations of power. Thus state power can only correspond to the power of a class whose interests the state represents. Here Poulantzas plans to deal with various existing, and mostly contemporary, theories of the ruling class. In such theories, Poulantzas discovers an unwillingness to attach power to the relations of production, to social classes, and instead to develop an autonomous theory of power distribution that has little to do with classes at all. The problem of the ruling class, therefore, according to this view, is that power is distributed globally in an uneven fashion, especially in autocratic societies. The emergence of power from classes is then proposed as a special case of power. Such an argument poses a dilemma for Marxist theory. If we say relations of production are all there is to be said about classes, we should be ignoring the political and ideological dimensions of power. And if we replied that that indeed this is a special case, this would reduce the economic and the juridical system to power relations. Neither response is satisfactory. The problem here lies in the confusion between structures and practices. Class relations are always

³⁷⁷ PPSC, 94. He cites Lenin, in ‘Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution,’ *Selected Works*, Volume 1, pages 455-566.

³⁷⁸ It is clear here that Poulantzas is not at all precise in his writing about his re-analysis of Lenin. There are many examples which could be cited. For example, what is to be made of this sentence : ‘The relations between these two series of relations of dislocation characterized by an unambiguous non-correspondence between the terms of the respective levels of these systems.’ (PPSC, 90) The sentence defies even the most thoughtful interpretation. And again, he comments : ‘The political struggle, whose *objective* is state power, has as its object the conjuncture. *It therefore bears on* (a) the economic ... (b) the political, in the strict sense; (c) the ideological. (PPSC, 92-93) How could the political struggle not bear on the political. To say as much is a simple tautology, or to tie oneself into knots. And what, precisely, does it mean to say ‘the political, in the strict sense ... ’ Again, the reader is left hanging, trying to understand the sense of the text. (The italics are in the original text in all cases.)

³⁷⁹ Lenin, ‘What the “Friends of the People” are,’ *Collected Works*, Volume 1, pages 141ff. cited by Poulantzas on page 96. Interestingly, in footnote 53, page 96, Poulantzas refers to the ‘mature Lenin’, as if, like Marx, he came to his senses later in life, and that his thinking began to coincide with that of the early Poulantzas.

³⁸⁰ PPSC, 97. Again Lenin is cited, this time in *Selected Works*, Volume 1, pages 455-566, and in ‘Working-class and Bourgeois Democracy,’ *Collected Works*, Volume 8, pages 72-82.

³⁸¹ This is Chapter Three under ‘General Questions’.

political relations, whether at the economic, political or ideological levels of the structure. But such a view might lead to the conclusion that state power is the only power that exists. Instead, it must be insisted that power relations exist at every level.

What, therefore, is 'economic power'?³⁸² Marx used the term economic power to refer to the economic domination of the ruling class. On the other hand, political and ideological power. As well as struggles over power can also exhibit forms of domination quite separate from economic considerations. Classes don't begin with power, however, and they are not founded in this realm.

Elite theory argues that the groups that control politics are different from those that control economic power.³⁸³ In this analysis there is no way scientifically³⁸⁴ to connect the economic and political dimensions, a problem that appears both in Michel's notion of the political class, and in Weber's status groups. This results from the earlier problem that Poulantzas has already canvassed in relation to the issue of class-in-itself and class-for-itself. How, then, shall power be defined? :

By power, we shall designate *the capacity of a social class to realize its specific objective interests*.³⁸⁵

Poulantzas has now set out his theoretical stall in unambiguous fashion, reducing all power to class power, and offering himself up as a target to all those who see power in a much wider context, with many other sources of origin. As we shall see later, this was a ready avenue for Foucault to travel down in search of a wider and more subtle theory of power.³⁸⁶ But for the moment, let us stay with Poulantzas as he develops this apparently highly reductionist argument further. The Poulantzian proposal separates itself from several other previous theoretical strategies. It is distinct from Lasswell's theory of decision-making,³⁸⁷ and from Weber, who argues that power is :

... the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of people.³⁸⁸

This, in the Poulantzian view, reduces power to a matter of legitimacy. In Parsons he sees another problem. For Parson, power is 'the capacity to carry on certain functions to the profit of the social system considered in its entirety',³⁸⁹ and this definition is clearly bound up with functionalist notions of integration and social systems. But Poulantzas wants to rush on. In his view, his new conception is 'capable of accounting for *the whole range* of Marxist analysis of this problem'.³⁹⁰ This is an extraordinary claim, in which he wants to assert he has solved the problem of power for all Marxist writing. The reader is put on notice that this is an attempt at nothing less than a paradigm shift in Marxist political theory.

³⁸² PPSC, 102.

³⁸³ PPSC, 103. He is referring to C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* here (New York, 1956, page 277), but also to Ralph Miliband, with whom he is about to engage in an extended debate.

³⁸⁴ Poulantzas is very keen to insist on the scientific status of his emerging theory, as well as the scientific status of Marxist theory in general.

³⁸⁵ PPSC, 104.

³⁸⁶ See *State, Power, Socialism* especially.

³⁸⁷ The references here are H.D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, *Power and Society, a framework for Social Enquiry*, 1950, pp 70ff ; and H.D. Lasswell, *Politics : who gets what, when, how*, 1936, New York, Whittlesey House, pp. 44ff.

³⁸⁸ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Glencoe, 1964, page 152.

³⁸⁹ From T. Parson, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*, Glencoe, 1960, pp. 199ff. ; 'On the concept of Power', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 107, No. 3, 1963. Cited in PPSC, page 105.

³⁹⁰ PPSC, 105. My italics in this instance.

First, Poulantzas argues, we must start with the assertion that this definition relates to all societies engaged in class struggle, which, one assumes, is all societies apart from socialist societies. And these societies, are by definition, societies engaged in class struggle. There is thus set up a condition of domination and subordination. When classes do not exist,³⁹¹ a structure of authority might be said to be in play. Power between individuals cannot be considered ; instead Poulantzas wants to use the term *might*.³⁹² This definition implies an element of force, but when this force is replaced with an element of consent, the term ‘power’ (*pouvoir*) has been used. Thus he seems to admit one might look at power in other ways, but these kinds of arguments are beyond the Marxist ambit, and thus hardly worth considering in any detail.³⁹³ He soon moves back to an elaboration of his own theory, and proposes that :

This concept of power refers to the *capacity* of a class to realize specific objective interest. This element of the concept of power has particular reference to Marx’s and Lenin’s analyses of *class organization*.³⁹⁴

Classes can exist even when that class might not have fully developed political and ideological structures, the ‘pertinent effects’ discussed above. Such classes might still develop as a social force, but they don’t fully emerge until the capacity to create the conditions of class power arise. Until, as Lenin has underlined, this class exerts its class power, its capacity for coercion, then it cannot be said to be effective. But this potential power always develops under a set of conditions. Thus having a political organization may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for taking power. This depends on the capacity of other classes to reach their aspirations.

What then, do class interests and objective interests mean? Class interest reside in the realm of class struggle. But they are not identical to class struggle. For functionalism, interests reside in the world of agents. Functionalists are then forced to introduce the concept of ‘latent interests’ which refers to the agents’ structural role, and the idea of ‘manifest interests’ which occur in the field of actual practices. So then latent interests give rise to ‘quasi-groups’, and manifest interest to ‘interest groups’. This is a rather similar position to one we have seen before :

Similar to the economist-historicist division of social ‘class’ into two conceptually delimited parts of is the functionalist division between (a) class-in-itself: class situation, latent interests, quasi-groups, and (b) groups-for-themselves: status, groups, political élites, manifest interests, interest groups.³⁹⁵

But this approach does not strike Poulantzas as ‘scientific’. Interests are always, by definitional fiat, the interests of a class. We must instead think of political class interests as the horizon of its action, the limits of political imagination, what the class might anticipate to strive for. And these horizons and interests are modified in the light of other class interests. Thus the capacity of a class to realise these interests is limited by the activities of its enemies.

Class interests are objective interests, not merely dreamlike aspirations. They result from the mutual independence of individuals around the labour relation.³⁹⁶ This means that interests must

³⁹¹ And where would this be, one is forced to ask, given that ‘The history of all hitherto existing societies in the history of class struggle’, apart from socialism.

³⁹² *PPSC*, 106.

³⁹³ See his footnote 12 for a dismissive comment about these ‘inter-personal’ phenomena.

³⁹⁴ *PPSC*, 107. The definition of structure as ‘the substratum and product of the agent’s behavior or conduct’ appears to refer to Parsons.

³⁹⁵ *PPSC*, 111.

³⁹⁶ Poulantzas is quoting Marx in *The German Ideology*, op. cit., page 44., on page 112 of *PPSC*.

always be distinguished from ‘all psychological connotations,’³⁹⁷ clearly an attempt to keep the Marxist argument well aware from bourgeois theories of individualism. But, nonetheless, ideology in any given society can give rise to delusions.

Poulantzas has now canvassed three elements of his theory of power – first, following his definition of power as the capacity of a class to realise its specific interests, he has canvassed its connection to the field of class struggle ; second, he has outlined the relation of this concept of power to the capacity of a class to realise its objective interests ; and, third, he has reviewed the embedded definition of class interests. Now he wishes to pursue a fourth dimension – ‘the *specificity* of the class interests to be realized’.³⁹⁸ Power is located at all levels of the class structure. Thus we might speak accurately of economic power, political power and ideological power. Power relations are complex, and, in the end determined by economic power. Yet the three elements may often be separated. Those with economic power may not have the capacity to take political power. He cites the case of the bourgeoisie in England in 1688, who, while holding economic power, could not take the reins of political power, which still remained in the hands of the landed gentry.

Poulantzas now turns his attention to state power and the state apparatus.³⁹⁹ What, then does state power mean? We should not take the view that the state has some sort of autonomous power. It is only social classes that hold power through the agency of the state. This power is orchestrated through what Poulantzas designates as ‘power centres’,⁴⁰⁰ such as the economic, political, military and cultural elements of the state.

Poulantzas also importantly defines structure here. Since the term is widely used in his writing, it is essential to draw out its meaning for us here. Thus far, he has been satisfied at pointing at the defects of the term, used to refer to roles and behaviours in structural-functionalism, for example, implying a wider and separate notion of structure for his own argument, without spelling out what this might be. Now a definition emerges :

... the concept of *structure* covers the *organizing matrix* of institutions. Through the functioning of the ideological, the structure always remains *hidden* in and by the institutional system which it organizes.⁴⁰¹

These institutions thus do not develop autonomous power of their own, but gain it because of their relative autonomy from social classes. They are not separate ‘organs of power’⁴⁰² ; rather it makes better sense to think of them as power centres. The precise degree to which one centre of power may hold a commanding position rests entirely on the balance of social forces within the state.

Lenin distinguished between ‘*state power*’ and ‘*state apparatus*’. By ‘state apparatus’ he meant the various elements in the institutions of the state, as well as the personnel working in the state.⁴⁰³ The

³⁹⁷ *PPSC*, 112.

³⁹⁸ *PPSC*, 113.

³⁹⁹ *PPSC*, 115-119.

⁴⁰⁰ A further definitional move, which suggests the various institutions of the state.

⁴⁰¹ To say also that this definition is hidden, rather like the social structure, is an understatement. Poulantzas has used this term repeatedly in the previous pages, and in his discussion of Marx and Lenin, he has been developing his own definition in the emerging text. It is to be found in footnotes 24, page 115.

⁴⁰² Poulantzas’s term used on page 115.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.* The reference is to ‘Political Report of the Central Committee to the 11th. Congress of the RCP (B), ‘Five Years of Russian Revolution – Report to the Fourth Comintern Congress’, and ‘Better Fewer, But Better’, *Selected Works*, Volume 3, pp. 671-710, 715-27 and 774-86.

key issue is to be clear that the state is never seen in this conception as a mere instrument of the ruling class.⁴⁰⁴

After 120 pages, Poulantzas now seems willing to move from a consideration of questions and a preliminary reading of the theoretical raw materials relating to the state, and to concentrate instead on the project of establishing a new state theory from the rubble left by his demolition of the old theories. Part Two, 'The Capitalist State' then embarks on this scheme.⁴⁰⁵ What, then, are the particular qualities of this kind of state compared to others? One of its primary qualities resides in the condition that it represents itself as a 'popular-class state', a state of the people. Its legitimacy does not rest on the divine law of monarchs, but rather on the notion of free individuals, universal suffrage, and an expression of the 'general will'.⁴⁰⁶ The liberty of individuals rests on the law, and not on tradition. The state and the nation are as one, the state representing the public interest.

However, we are not clear of problems with existing theory yet, and Poulantzas returns to a series of issues that have muddled Marxist thinking to date concerning the nature of the capitalist state. There has been a separation, for example, between the notion of 'civil society' and 'the state', a separation that readers will remember was emphasized, reinforced, one might say, even reified, by Gramsci. The very idea of the individual can be said to have emerged with capitalism as a result of the rise of the new form of economy. Thus the agents of production evolve as separate, autonomous citizens free to act as they wish. This notion of civil society, derived from Hegel, and developed by Gramsci and others, rests on the idea of the alienated individual – the relation of an individual to the state.⁴⁰⁷

Two results stem from this line of argument. First, we cannot understand the relation between class struggle and the state going down this path. Individuals thus constructed cannot be made to form social classes, and thus the whole Marxist problematic is put at risk. Second, such an approach hides a series of problems behind the separation of state and civil society. In particular, we cannot understand the relative autonomy of the ideological and the political from the economy through this line of questioning.

Instead, let us consider the problem of the capitalist state and the economy. Capitalism dissolves old ways of being, old social structures embedded in feudalism. Poulantzas wants to dismiss Marx's insistence on the rise of the individual as a 'merely descriptive' strategy that describes the liberation of the citizenry from the ties of feudalism. But Marx does not mean, Poulantzas wants also to insist, that people are now free, later to be inserted into social classes as capitalism develops. It means only that old ties dissolve, and perhaps the new ties are not yet obvious. What is really to be understood is that capitalism constitutes a stage in which the producer becomes separated from 'his' means of production in the rise of large-scale industry. The labour process becomes collectivized, and it leads to the concentration of capital. So we must get beyond the question of the individual-subject and the separation of civil society and the state. We must instead establish the *relative autonomy of the state* from the economic system.⁴⁰⁸ How then, does the state relate to class struggle? This is the question that now takes centre stage. While the idea of civil society might allow for the relative autonomy of

⁴⁰⁴ Poulantzas then spends some time dismissing theories of 'zero-sum power' attributed to C. Wright Mills and others.

⁴⁰⁵ Part Two comprises pages 123-184.

⁴⁰⁶ *PPSC*, 123.

⁴⁰⁷ *PPSC*, 124.

⁴⁰⁸ My italics. A fundamental shift in his thinking is signposted here, the beginning of his further detailing of the new state theory in the pages to come. (*PPSC*, page 127) It also signals a clear break from Gramsci.

the state, it cannot do justice to the relations of production. The state, described by Poulantzas here as the juridico-political structure, is related to the economy by law. The new agents of capitalism are fixed in their places by the emergence of capitalist law. This happens precisely in the rise of contract law and the establishment of a legal structure surrounding the capital-labour relation – the buying and selling of labour power. A dominant ideology develops at the same time that masks this development. Poulantzas is using a common trope in his writing style here. He uses the phrase ‘It is hardly necessary to emphasize’⁴⁰⁹ to suggest that all us clever people have already seen through the mask of capitalism to the real truth of the matter. He is only reminding us here of what we already know. And what is it that we already know? That the rising ideology of capitalism is taking the place of religion under the old régime, hiding the truth from the emerging class of labourers. What is actually going on as capitalism emerges, of course, is the establishment of a nation-wide, and then a global, system of domination and exploitation. While this system is established at first in private locations, where ‘private’ individuals are created, this private system is, in fact, part of a much larger system of production, overseen by the emerging state.

The rise of the capitalist state and the emerging ideological structures has the effect of preventing the emerging labouring classes from understanding the class nature of the new society. Indeed, individuals sense this shift in class relations as an alienating and isolating experience. There is competition between workers for jobs. This isolation further conceals the connection that workers actually have in the sense that they have common interests. This individualism separates worker from worker, private capitalist from private capitalist, and one branch of industry from another.⁴¹⁰

We must not forget that other groups remain in existence within capitalism. There is, for example, the case of the small-holding peasants, who are also isolated from the new developments, a holdover from feudalism. Into this gap steps the state. The state appears as the agent of unity, as a representative of the common interest. It systemically conceals its class nature. The state, in fact, has a dual function – to establish a normative juridical structure,⁴¹¹ and to represent the unity of the social formation. This form of unity must cover a realm of problems and sources of isolation – between one capitalist and another ; between one group of workers and another ; between the classes, and between public and private interests.

Poulantzas is then at pains to point out some errors of interpretation deriving from Marx’s work.⁴¹² Poulantzas argues that Marx was trying to understand a new phenomenon by using theoretical ideas from the past. Here Poulantzas acknowledges the contributions of the ‘Italian School’, who have pointed out the errors besetting the instrumentalist theory of the state, but this approach also leaves many problems to be solved. It leaves, for example, the problem of the relation between class struggle and the state unsettled. We should remember from the Marxist classics that the new state acts, in the last instance, to establish and maintain the role of the dominant classes under the guise of protecting the public interest.⁴¹³

Poulantzas now takes up the concept of hegemony. Derived in its most recent sense from the work of Gramsci, it remains none the less a vague and incomplete concept. Again this is a familiar

⁴⁰⁹ This is on page 128 in the discussion of the rise of the capitalist state.

⁴¹⁰ *PPSC*, 131.

⁴¹¹ *PPSC*, 133. Poulantzas refers to a ‘juridical reality’ here rather usefully.

⁴¹² *PPSC*, 134ff.

⁴¹³ *PPSC*, 137.

strategy Poulantzas is using, setting out concepts from the ‘great masters’, finding them wanting, and rectifying them. He starts by saying what is meant by hegemony. It is the way in which Gramsci describes the ‘political practices of the dominant classes’.⁴¹⁴ In these practices, the state plays a role in class leadership. Gramsci thought he had discovered the concept in Lenin’s work, but to Poulantzas’s eyes, this is a new idea that speaks to the issue of how the dominant classes engage in political practice. And again, as before with his commentary on Marx and Lenin, he sees a youthful ‘error’ in Gramsci’s work, an error corrected by maturity. He sees historicism in the youthful use of the concept, and he finds also a more mature elaboration later on. Yet still in these mature works we find elements of historicism still lingering. In a first reading, hegemony seems to suggest that class domination is not simply coercion, but rather rests on consent, an active consent ‘given’ by the dominated class. Thus the ideological world view of the dominating class provides the unitary ideology of a given society. Gramsci uses the idea of hegemony to distinguish capitalism from feudalism. In feudalism, economic and political relations are grafted together, mixed very tightly, with little chance of freedom or autonomy. In the ‘modern’ state, an atomization of individuals has taken place due to the rise of the new economy, and thus it is the role of the state to recover a necessary unity.

Thus, having told us that the concept of hegemony is amenable to a process of ‘purification’,⁴¹⁵ Poulantzas then shows us how he will use hegemony going forward :

The concept of hegemony, *which we shall apply only to the political practices of the dominant classes* of a capitalist formation, and not to its state, is used in two senses :

1. It indicates how ... the political interests of these classes are constituted, as representatives of the ‘general interest’ of the body politics ... (and)
2. ... in another sense, which is not actually pointed out by Gramsci. The capitalist state and the specific characteristics of the class struggle in a capitalist formation *make it possible* for a ‘power bloc’, composed of several *politically dominant* classes or fractions to function. Among these *dominant* classes and fractions one of them holds a particular *dominant role*, which can be characterized as a *hegemonic role*.⁴¹⁶

A ‘double function’ is thus assigned to the concept of hegemony, which now acts both to show how the dominant classes express their narrow interests as the common interest, as well as to show how a ruling category emerges from the cluster of dominant groups available to lead.

We consider now what kinds of capitalist state can be said to exist.⁴¹⁷ Already Marx, Engels and Lenin have distinguished forms of the state typical in various modes of production, and, within these modes of production, various ‘forms of state’ or ‘forms of government’. What is especially important here is to distinguish the capitalist state is the autonomy that the state enjoys from the economic realm. How does the state develop this autonomy, and how does the state relate specifically to the dominant classes and their political practices?⁴¹⁸ In every society, several modes of production co-exist, and thus the state must attempt to represent unity in the face of a complex social structure. Yet in capitalism, one mode of production dominates. But even in such societies, as in the case of Bismarck’s Germany, the feudal state may still predominate politically over a capitalist economy.

⁴¹⁴ PPSC, 137. The citation is to *Prison Notebooks*, page 55.

⁴¹⁵ PPSC, 140.

⁴¹⁶ PPSC, 141.

⁴¹⁷ PPSC, 142-156.

⁴¹⁸ PPSC, 143.

In the work of Weber, we find the problem of historicism raises its head again.⁴¹⁹ Weber develops a ‘typology of juridico-political superstructures’⁴²⁰ by using mysticism and rationality as defining qualities. Thus emerges the rational-legal, the traditional and the charismatics types of state. These formulations result from the values of the investigator, and from the motivations of the men who create them. In the last analysis, the typology only deals with actors, and not with structures, and thus is of limited value in delineating all the various forms of state, though it might be argued that the rational-legal form of state does align with the capitalist state structure.

We still face the fundamental problem – what kinds of capitalist state exist? This new form of state is, from the first, distinguished by the autonomy of the economic and political structures. Thus the different types of state must refer to the *degree of autonomy* established in any particular state formation.⁴²¹ There are no simple steps or progressions that mark the development of the capitalist state. We might usefully talk of the beginning of the state and the period of reproduction of the same state structure. Some of these stages might include a movement from simple market capitalism to state monopoly capitalism through private capitalist production, social capitalist production and monopoly capitalism.⁴²² In these various forms of the state, the degree of autonomy between the political and the economic varies considerably. For example :

... it is clear that private capitalism involves a non-interventionist state and monopoly capitalism involves an interventionist state.⁴²³

These examples, in Poulantzas’s view, comprise ‘*variables of a specific invariant*’.⁴²⁴ One is forced to comment that they come close to the use of Weber’s ideal types, in spite of the historicist and subjectivist criticism heaped upon him. None the less the key point is clear. All capitalist states exhibit a relatively autonomous state, and the degree of this autonomy varies. Various forms of capitalism exist at the same time, it is also clear. Thus various stages of capitalism might be said to exist – private, social, monopoly, state monopoly. Depending on the dominant form of capitalism at any given time, the relationship between the state and the economy will vary. It is a mistake to argue, as many have, that the rise of the liberal state is the rise of the noninterventionist state, however. This is not what Marx proposes in *Capital*. In fact, no clear account of the state is provided, nor a way in which the state intervenes into the economic realm.⁴²⁵

We must also distinguish between forms of state and forms of régimes. For example, the liberal state can exist as a constitutional monarchy, as in Britain, or a parliamentary republic, as in France. Régimes are thus variables within a particular form of the state. Thus, there can be said to be stages in the development of the capitalist state. But these stages do not come in some simple chronological order, but rather in a variety of patterns depending on the particular conditions of a given society. In actual circumstances, several ‘stages’ of development may be ‘skipped’, which is surprising if we are expecting a simple historical path to be followed. And a particular type of state can exist in various forms. There may also be various dislocations between structure (the juridico-

⁴¹⁹ *PPSC*, 146.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ My italics.

⁴²² *PPSC*, 149. This cluster of capitalist stages is listed by Poulantzas at the bottom of this page.

⁴²³ *PPSC*, 150.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *PPSC*, 152-153.

political superstructure) and the field of class practices. Thus a liberal state can co-exist with a stage of monopoly capital, for example.⁴²⁶

Poulantzas now spends a chapter on the absolutist state and the transitional state.⁴²⁷ This writing primarily concerns the movement that takes place between feudalism and capitalism. In this moment, the state and the economy do not appear to be aligned. This results from a condition in which the rise of the bourgeoisie as an economic class happens before the rise of a parallel political system. The struggle at this stage is between the landed nobility and the rising bourgeoisie. Capitalism fully emerges in the period of large-scale industrial production. Capitalism starts with the emergence of the free labourer, but this free labourer may still be working on the land, in close contact with the product of his labour. It is only in large-scale production that real appropriation occurs.⁴²⁸ The emergence of capitalism in Europe depends on the rise of a new kind of economy coupled with a new state. In the transition from capitalism to socialism, the process is quite different. Socialism establishes itself on new economic terrain, through the social ownership of the means of production. In capitalism the ground of private property has already been prepared. In the transitional state, there is therefore a condition of relative autonomy between the mostly feudal nature of the state, and the bourgeois nature of the emerging economy. And the function of the absolutist state is to produce the conditions under which this new mode of production can come into being, while ending the era of feudal relations.⁴²⁹

The absolutist state starts to emerge during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Europe. The change results from a crisis in the feudalist economy, the collapse of feudal agriculture, and the rise of manufacturing, the early development of international trade, and a decline in population. As the new economy expands, the absolutist state, typified by monarchical rule, strengthens its hold until well into the seventeenth century. The state is characterised by absolute power, usually in the hands of a single individual, with little to limit this power. Power derives from divine law, and is thus superficially unquestionable. Such a power, however, depends on the support of the landed interests, the so-called 'Great Estates'. The sovereignty of the state is thus a mixture of divine sanction and territoriality. The church often plays a central role in such arrangements. The political power of the state, through its divine connections, appears to be separate from economic interests. Popular assemblies start to emerge and the monarch reigns over such gatherings. As well, a written juridical system comes into being during this period. The state is said to embody the public realm, the justification for this arrangement arising from divine privilege. This is the beginning of the rise of the social contract.

How do the army and the bureaucracy function in such a society? In the absolutist state, the army remains under the divine power of the monarch. The feudal army, raised from large landowners, is now replaced by a mercenary army, free from feudal ties.⁴³⁰ In the case of the bureaucracy, the influence of the rising capitalist economy is more obvious. The members of the state are no longer appointed through social connections as members of a political caste. Instead the functionaries take on the duties required of a state emerging to serve the public interest, at least at a nominal level. Indeed, the breakdown of feudal relations of production can only occur with the aid of a state

⁴²⁶ *PPSC*, 155.

⁴²⁷ Chapter 3 under the heading 'The Capitalist State', pages 158-167.

⁴²⁸ *PPSC*, 159.

⁴²⁹ *PPSC*, 160-161.

⁴³⁰ *PPSC*, 164.

directing its action to a new productive mode, that is, a *state with a capitalist character*.⁴³¹ The state is acting against the nobility, even as the bourgeoisie are not yet ready to take political power.

Does the autonomy of the state emerge from a balance of class forces, as Engels has proposed? This does not seem to be an adequate account. The relation between the state and social classes appears rather to be very complex, and not to be reduced to a simple balancing act. What emerges from these struggles in the second half of the nineteenth century, is the rise of the liberal state.

Poulantzas now turns to the nature of the 'Bourgeois Revolution'.⁴³² If the absolutist state sets the scene for the political rise of the bourgeoisie, how do the historical facts line up? Is there a typical form of bourgeois revolution? In Poulantzas's view, no such typical model exists.

Poulantzas has made two interesting points in the past few pages. At the end of the last chapter,⁴³³ he uses the phrase 'From the point of view of the state', a suggestion that the state has completely autonomous interests, a motivation and a consciousness. This sense of the conscious state peppers his work, but it is clearly not a part of his central argument, which would assert, it is clear, that the state has no life, no vitality, no motivation apart from those of the class struggle and the attempts towards social unity. However, the idea remains in the texts. In this new chapter, he also chooses to go 'off-grid', and to tell us that he will not cite Marx and Engels in this section because he has cited them very often at prior occasions.⁴³⁴

He begins his examination of the bourgeois revolutions with a discussion of the British case. The two dates of 1640 and 1688 for him 'mark the bourgeois revolution'.⁴³⁵ The feudal nobility start, during this period, their long march towards becoming a capitalist class. But this is only the beginning of the revolution – the commercial bourgeoisie are barely formed, and the industrial bourgeoisie are beyond the horizon of the future. But capitalism rapidly came to dominate the countryside. The patriarchal mode of production, through small-scale production, was swiftly brought to an end. The revolution thus started with a fraction of the feudal class who could see opportunities in capitalism. Thus there slowly emerged a capitalist agriculture, a mixture of the old and the new, which comprised :

- (i) Large-scale owners of ground-rent, an infinitesimal minority which monopolized the ownership of land (ii) tenant farmers; and (iii) agricultural workers, who constituted the immense majority.⁴³⁶

The British peasantry thus rapidly disappeared from the economy, and were never to play any further autonomous role in the political life of the country. Commercial capitalism started under the management of the landed gentry, until in the 1830's, with the rise of the Reform Bills, when they gradually began to assert their political authority. The Whig Party, representing the large landowners with a decidedly reformist and progressive bent, was the mechanism by which this transformation gradually took place. A legal system emerged in the 17th. Century that altered the law surrounding the ownership of land, thus enabling ground-rent relationships to emerge. But it still remained the case that feudal elements still held onto political power well into the late 19th. Century. At the

⁴³¹ The phrase and the italics are Poulantzas's, page 166.

⁴³² Chapter Four in the 'Capitalist State' section, pages 168-184.

⁴³³ Page 167.

⁴³⁴ *PPSC*, 168.

⁴³⁵ His phrase, page 168.

⁴³⁶ *PPSC*, 170.

highest levels of the state, there still remained a preference for appointing members of the peerage. The state was not required to intervene to bring about the economic revolution – the ground had already been prepared. Thus the British revolution succeeded because of the early dominance of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture allowing the transition to bourgeois dominance. The economic appears to have dominated ‘in the last instance’, and those that dominated the economic sphere came, at the last, to be the leading members of the hegemonic bloc. The state secured its autonomy, being for a long period in the hands of feudal interests, only later falling into the hands of the bourgeoisie.⁴³⁷

The French case follows a different path. France has often been presented as the typical bourgeois revolution. It is argued that the absolutist state put the bourgeoisie in charge. Thus there was an immediate gain of political power, the feudal system having exhausted itself, with Jacobinism, a petty bourgeois ideology, dominating French society during this transition. But, according to our author, such a history is *mythical*.⁴³⁸

First, Poulantzas claims that the bourgeois takeover was less decisive in France than it was in Britain or in Germany, a surprising claim, given that France is always held to have undergone the most clear-cut revolution of the three case studies under examination. His evidence for this claim lies in the failure of the French state to ‘cut the knot’ with the French peasantry, who were not readily shifted from their agricultural practices of the past. Indeed, he claims, the French Revolution secured the small peasantry in place. The revolution also resulted in the security of the petty bourgeoisie, who developed along with the emerging commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. Following Hobsbawm, we can conclude that 19th. Century economic development :

...contains one *gigantic paradox*: France. On paper, no country should have advanced more rapidly. It possessed institutions ideally suited to capitalist development ... Yet in fact French economic development at the base was distinctly slower than that of other countries ... This was because ... the capitalist part of the French economy was a superstructure erected on the immovable base of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie ...⁴³⁹

The French bourgeoisie did indeed gain power, but they paid a price, according to Poulantzas. They depended on some categories of workers, the small peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, with whom they were forced to share power. In contrast to Britain, they were required to eliminate the nobility to make this arrangement secure. Thus the bourgeoisie could not form an alliance with the nobility, nor form a state with their blessing and support. What resulted was the emergence of the Second and Third Empires, which were characterised by a state dependent on the support of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, which, in turn, resulted in a bourgeois revolution continually in crisis. By the time the bourgeoisie finally turned its back on the nobility, the industrial working class had emerged as a powerful political force.

Thus the bourgeoisie were never able to form a properly capitalist state. It was certainly lacking the feudal quality of the British state, but the state was still in the hands of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, a bourgeois state in theory only. And the state failed to last. In this case, the state dominated in many instances, rather than allowing the economic sphere to develop. Thus, the new

⁴³⁷ *PPSC*, 173.

⁴³⁸ His italics, page 173.

⁴³⁹ Hobsbawm, cited in Poulantzas, page 174-175. The original citation is to page 177ff., Hobsbawm, E. J. 1996. *The age of revolution 1789-1848*. New York: Vintage Books.

economy took far more time to evolve than in Britain. Additionally, the state was constantly in crisis because of the complex class structural support of the state, and as a result of rising working class interests.⁴⁴⁰ The French bourgeoisie are often contrasted with the British, the British tainted with the flavour of the feudal class resonating in their ears, the French a ‘purer’ form of revolution. But French Jacobinism has within it revolutionary ideas, ideas that Poulantzas terms ‘the maggot hidden inside the fruit’.⁴⁴¹ There are strong arguments against wealth and for social equality, and a claim on behalf of the proletariat, hardly the stuff of bourgeois dreams. But in Poulantzas’s view, this argument is overblown and overdrawn – we shall never find the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in this line of reasoning, he claims. Instead, the ideology expresses the hopes and the dreams of small peasants and the petty bourgeoisie, the ideology of smallholders :

Jacobinism projected as its social ideal a society made up of small-scale independent producers (both peasants and artisans), a society in which each man owns his own field, his own shop or stall and is able to support his family without recourse to wage-labour and without being exploited by ‘the very rich’.⁴⁴²

So this vision stands in direct contradiction to the fundamental notions of bourgeois ideology, and these ideas came from the classes that were supporting the French state during much of the 19th Century. The French working class came to take up elements of Jacobinism, especially in the utopian socialism of Proudhon.⁴⁴³ Jacobinism thus remains an ambiguous ideology, and this ambiguity results from the particular class nature of the bourgeois revolution in France.

Poulantzas now turns to the German case, which he has mentioned several times before as an example of a ‘revolution from above’. It is sometimes implied that a bourgeois revolution took place in 1848 with the issuing of a constitution. Nothing could be further from the truth, Poulantzas claims.⁴⁴⁴ The landed nobility still remained in power, and, as with Britain, the feudal system was to retain power for a long time to come. Indeed, of the three case studies to hand, it appears that this class still dominated the political realm well into the 20th century and until the rise of the Weimar Republic after the First World War. In this environment, Bismarck brought about a bourgeois revolution ‘from above’, and the state, under the management of feudal landlords, started to transform itself in the direction of bourgeois interests. The emergence of the bourgeois economy took place side by side with a feudal state. At the same time, the German working class were finding their political feet. The French revolution was vividly alive in the imagination of the newly emerging German bourgeois class, and they were reluctant to dismiss their connection with the German nobility. Thus strong feudal structures lasted up until and beyond the First World War, with feudal hegemony being sustained in the political arena throughout the 19th Century. Notwithstanding, the feudal state had within it juridical elements useful to the rise of new forms of property and capitalist ownership.

What happened in German agriculture? Small-scale producers were taken over by large landowners, and this resulted in the replacement of small landowners by a mass of landless agricultural labourers. This shift ended small-scale ownership, but it sustained feudalism. In any event, the small-scale

⁴⁴⁰ Readers will note two paragraphs that start with the word ‘finally’ on pages 177 and 178, a slight confusion in the author’s mind. The text is also short of the final letters on two lines at the end of page 177 in the Verso version. This is rather surprising because, to date, the text has been flawless and error free. This may be a printer’s error.

⁴⁴¹ *PPSC*, 178.

⁴⁴² *PPSC*, 179.

⁴⁴³ *PPSC*, 180.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

landowners were never a major political force as they were in France, and the resentments these take-overs caused were clearly, in the Poulantzian view, seeds of the rise of Nazism in another generation. And we also can see the sources of Nazism elsewhere. The bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie rose slowly and together, both resisting the interests of the working class, both struggling against the permanent hold that feudal interests appeared to have over the state. This particular mixture of interests gives rise, after the First World War, to the emergence of the Nazi state from this source, as the aspirations of both the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie were dashed in the aftermath of the conflict.

Thus no paradigm case can be found that suggests a model bourgeois revolution. This section of writing is perhaps the most illuminating found in Poulantzas's texts to date. The vivid use of historical evidence, coupled with a supple use of his newly evolving theoretical armature makes a clear case for the significance of class history and class struggle in explaining the rise of the bourgeois state. There are clear differences elegantly drawn in these three case histories, and the reader can follow the argument very straightforwardly. There is less of the endless debate with the ghosts of the theoretical past. He seems to be setting himself free here. This is newly mature writing and new theorising, and it is very persuasive. Poulantzas concludes that in none of these cases was the bourgeoisie able to make its own political case, that is, to produce a state that directly worked for its own interests, at least at the beginning of the new mode of production. Instead, in Germany and Britain, feudal interests sustained power, even as the state moved in the direction of bourgeois interests. In France, the small peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie held sway over the state. All these developments were profoundly significant for rising working class interests. In Britain, trade-unionism emerged, class struggle at the economic level at the expense of seizing the state. In France, the problem was Jacobinism, essentially a petty bourgeois dream, and it sat poorly with the hopes of the working class. In Germany, the problem lay in the failed attempt to make the state do what the working class wanted it to do, to act as a sort of neutral mediator in the game of the class struggle.

Poulantzas now turns his attention to the 'Fundamental Characteristics of the Capitalist State', part three of his five-part argument.⁴⁴⁵ In *Capital*, only a brief outline of these characteristics is provided. But we can now see that the capitalist state acts as an agent of social cohesion at the economic, political and ideological level with relation to the class struggle. The state sets the limits on the field of class struggle, the state managing the complex dynamic that exists between the dominated and the dominant. The state is represented as the embodiment of the interests of a mass of private individuals, and not as a class state. It therefore has a profoundly ambiguous and complex role. In the case of the dominated classes, the state must maintain a condition where the members of those classes are prevented from understanding and acting upon their common interests. The state thus maintains the political disorganization of the dominated classes, while simultaneously organising the elements of the power bloc. It establishes itself as the embodiment of a bourgeois vision, but a vision in which all citizens can participate.⁴⁴⁶

Poulantzas then expands his account of the dominated classes and the state. He starts with the assertion of the autonomy of the economic from the political in capitalism, a variation on his well-established theory of relative autonomy. The state cannot act narrowly in the interests of the bourgeoisie, but in the end this is the outcome of its action. But the state is flexible and fluid in its

⁴⁴⁵ Pages 187-255.

⁴⁴⁶ Again, Poulantzas seems to be inferring that the state has an independent consciousness. (see page 189 in particular)

role. As he is later to say, the state is a relationship, rather than a structure. 'The state may act, in the short-term, against ruling interests. Thus :

... the state is not a class instrument, but rather the state of a society divided into classes.⁴⁴⁷

This succinct quotation describes much of what is to come in the following pages. Constantly playing this role of mediator on behalf of the dominant order, the state manages a class-divided society. Much of the argument is here repetitive – yes, the state acts to disorganize the dominated classes and organise the dominant – this much is already known. But it is perhaps Poulantzas's contribution to separate this argument from those who would simply call capitalism and the capitalist state a sealed box – dominant economic interests mean dominant political interests. Instead he wants to argue that the bourgeois state is not merely a lie, but rather a mechanism in which genuine assets can be assigned to the dominated, all the while ensuring that capitalism and the dominant classes survive intact. This means that the state forms a compromise,⁴⁴⁸ and that this compromise is unstable by its very nature. So clearly this does not mean there is a harmonious balance between the classes. Obviously, the dominant classes 'win in the last instance', but in order to maintain social stability, certain concrete concessions must be made to subordinate interests. The state is thus two-sided. It has autonomy from the economic sphere to undertake social policy, and this also means it has the capacity to cut into the economic power of the dominant classes without ever threatening their political power. In this theoretical arena the problem of the emergence of the 'Welfare State' appears.⁴⁴⁹ These arguments are sketched out in *Capital* but not fully formed.

We now turn to the issue of ideology, and Poulantzas begins by tackling the problem of historicism. The state and classes are clearly connected at the ideological, as well as the political and economic, levels. This is merely to state the obvious. The notion of hegemony embodies this relationship. Here Gramsci offers a major contribution in that he sees through the problem of historicism and understands the role of ideology within capitalism in a particularly subtle way. In Marx, we find the notion of ideology as 'a projection in an imaginary world of the subject's mystified essence'.⁴⁵⁰ Ideology is false consciousness, and this conception of ideology has remained at the centre of historicist accounts of ideology. In this view, ideology is associated with alienation. Under communism, alienation and false consciousness are said to have disappeared because social subjects have regained their essence, ideologies have disappeared and science has replaced them. And, interestingly, in contemporary accounts from the left, including those provided by Marcuse, ideology has been absorbed into the real, and the end of ideology has arrived.⁴⁵¹

But it is with Lukács where historicism takes hold especially.⁴⁵² Gramsci is often read through the lens of Lukács's reading, so an analysis of his work becomes very important. In the Lukács view the class-subject of history is organised into a political class with a determined world view. This world view has within it both ideology and science. This world view forms the consciousness of 'men' who then make their own history :

⁴⁴⁷ *PPSC*, 191.

⁴⁴⁸ *PPSC*, 192.

⁴⁴⁹ *PPSC*, 193.

⁴⁵⁰ *PPSC*, 195.

⁴⁵¹ *PPSC*, 196-197.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

Thus the role assigned to ideology through the medium of the class-subject is that of the principle of totalizing a social formation, which is precisely the young Marx's position when he held that it is ideas that rule the world and the weapons of criticism that can change it.⁴⁵³

Such a view is common in contemporary political science. Lukács and Weber are clearly closely connected, and Weber is followed quite strictly by Parsons, so the links between Lukács and modern functionalism are not hard to delineate. The development of normative social action through the production of a normative set of ideas is not a million miles from the Lukács argument. In Weber, this argument leads to his ideal types of state, and focuses especially on the question of legitimacy, and the actions of agents to bring these forms of state into being.

Lukács appears to be adding Marx to Weber. In this historicist account of totality, there is simply no place for a single cause, yet ideology appears to play a predominant role – history driven by ideas. Some writers have taken Gramsci to mean much the same thing – history driven by the class conscious ideology of a hegemonic class. Such a view seems to be dominant in the pages of the *New Left Review*.⁴⁵⁴ But Gramsci also achieves two theoretical breakthroughs – the idea of ideology as a cement in a given formation, and the break he makes with ideology as a conceptual system.⁴⁵⁵

Lukács is unable to explain how dominant ideology is generally associated with the dominant class. If this dominant ideology expresses the totality of the social formation, how can it, at one and the same time, express the ideology of a single class. This leads to further questions – how does the ideological universe gain coherence ; how does the dominant ideology permeate the subordinate classes ; how is it that this ideology is the ideology of the dominant class? The Lukácsian argument leads to a series of errors that require correction :

In general it leads to what can be termed an *over-politicization* of ideologies, the latter being considered as if they were political number-plates worn by social classes on their backs.⁴⁵⁶

Thus no autonomy can be awarded to the ideological realm, because things are never this way in actually existing societies. In addition, this relation between dominant class and dominant ideology is always masked.⁴⁵⁷ Thus a whole series of confusions and uncertainties emerge in any given society that are not covered by the Lukács argument. As well, the argument does not adequately explain the ideology of the working class. The question here is – who is right, Lenin or Gramsci? Lenin wants to insist that the working class cannot rise to power until they have gained the state ; state power comes first. Gramsci wants to argue instead that the hegemony of new ideas must come first before a working class revolution can occur. Gramsci is closer to the Lukácsian problematic that the ideological view and the political are strongly tied together. Gramsci and Lukács are in error here in assuming that ideological domination is all that matters, and that the dominant ideology is somehow monolithic and impermeable to a variety of influences.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, if ideologies are number-plates that people carry on their backs, then it would impossible to admit the influence of other

⁴⁵³ *PPSC*, 198.

⁴⁵⁴ *PPSC*, 200. Poulantzas allows that improvements have been made recently, and indeed went on to publish with *NLR* later on several occasions.

⁴⁵⁵ *PPSC*, 201.

⁴⁵⁶ *PPSC*, 202.

⁴⁵⁷ *PPSC*, pages 202-203.

⁴⁵⁸ *PPSC*, 205.

classes,⁴⁵⁹ as, for example, in the case of the '*contamination of working class ideology by the dominant and petty bourgeois ideologies*'.⁴⁶⁰ The various ideologies thus appear to be hermetically sealed one against another, and thus no permeability is allowed, no mixing of ideas. How, then, can ruling class ideology permeate and come to dominate the working class? But the 'correct' Marxist view ought to be that revolutionary working class ideas must arise from Marxist science, in the separation of ideology from science, and from the rejection of ideology.⁴⁶¹

What, then, is the Marxist conception of ideology? Ideology comprises a set of relatively coherent ideas. 'Men' engage in political, economic and ideological life. Ideological life refers to religious, moral, aesthetic and philosophical activities.⁴⁶² Ideology refers to a set of understandings that arise through the lived experience of individuals, and it becomes indistinguishable from that lived experience. Ideologies must thus be said to have a dual nature, a reflection of a real experience, and a sense of an imaginary world simultaneously. Thus ideology is not just consciousness of the world. Given that ideology is partly imaginary it is, by definition, false. The purpose of ideology is to insert human agents into the world in the locations required of them with the beliefs they require in that location. Ideology is thus determined by social structure, and it remains opaque to the agents who experience it. Ideology has the precise function of obscuring the world from those who experience it, as opposed to science. Ideology, in the Gramscian sense of 'cement', has the function of obscuring the world, by shaping human consciousness into a relatively coherent world-view. Thus ideology has the function of cohesion. It does not allow for contradiction.

Ideology is thus the culture of a given social formation.⁴⁶³ But this proposed unity is constructed on an imaginary plane. Ideology is determined by class relations that distribute agents to positions in the class structure. This is perhaps the most vivid incarnation of the class-structural position Poulantzas takes to date. Here the argument is simple and quintessentially structuralist. Class societies assign agents to positions, and these positions have ideologies attached to them.⁴⁶⁴

The dominant ideology, by assuring the practical insertion of agents in the social structure, aims at the maintenance (the cohesion) of this structure, and this means *above all* class domination and exploitation.⁴⁶⁵

This is how an ideology of a dominant class dominates society. But dominant ideology includes elements from the ideology of other classes, just as each society has within it a range of ideas from many sources. We begin to form an idea of ideology full of complexity and contradiction, with subsets of classes, along with various class fractions, holding on to certain and separate views, all the while over-determined by a dominant class ideology. And this ideological structure appears across a host of institutions – political, religious, economic, for example. For Poulantzas, there is a wide ensemble of ideologies associated with these institutions. So having first asserted a simplistic notion of dominant class ideology, he now reminds us of the complexity and subtlety of this structure. And one 'region' of this ideological complexity commonly reigns over other regions. The region that can

⁴⁵⁹ Poulantzas is repeating himself in this section, rehearsing again the argument in part b of this discussion. He repeats himself, but then elaborates further on the idea.

⁴⁶⁰ Quoted on pages 205, in italics in the original, a familiar tactic he uses to emphasize key points.

⁴⁶¹ *PPSC*, 206.

⁴⁶² The reference on page 207 is to Althusser, *For Marx*, op. cit.. No page reference is given.

⁴⁶³ *PPSC*, 208.

⁴⁶⁴ *PPSC*, 209.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, italics in the original. Poulantzas follows Lenin's line in this argument here, and comments approvingly of his arguments.

be said to dominate is that region which best hides the function of the ideology in a given society. In feudal society, this role falls to the church ; in bourgeois society, it falls to the juridico-political system. In monopoly capitalism, it is economic ideology that predominates.⁴⁶⁶ While religion can be said to tie people together, the juridico-political ideology of capitalism acts to separate and isolate them. It creates individual, autonomous subjects. These changes allow for the rise of the labour contract, private property, competition between workers, and the rise of market and exchange relations. Thus a certain way of seeing the world emerges, a world view that excludes ideas of class exploitation. Instead, notion of equality, justice and the law are superimposed on a society riven with economic inequality and injustice. The state and ideology are closely connected because the state is the site where the newly-formed ideology originates and resides, and particularly in the bureaucracy. The state represents itself as the agent of national unity, not as the agent of class domination. Parliament is the agent of the public will, the political parties representing the public interest.

Bourgeois ideologies thus represent themselves as science. In the present world, Poulantzas claims, it is incorrect to follow Gramsci in arguing that hegemony must be secured for the dominant world view to prevail. Instead, it is necessary only to appeal to science, and in this case, public opinion polls, to show that the common view is being followed, that we all consent to a similar world view. The new world view is thus manifested in public knowledge, a body of practical rules, based on logic and reason. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, all the bourgeois values, are encapsulated here. This representation of the world thus excludes any notion of class struggle as utopian, and produces a new sense of the world as a mass society, which brings into being the end of ideology, the end of class struggle, the end of conflict. Totalitarian ideologies of communism and fascism are then contrasted with bourgeois liberal ideologies. Totalitarianism assimilates the individual into the state ; liberal ideological separate individuals out.⁴⁶⁷

Thus bourgeois ideology both isolates and coheres. It sets up agents as free, separate, equal individuals, establishing the formal isolation of citizens. They gain their social existence through the state, which embodies the general will, and can use its authority when needed. Rousseau said :

Man must be as independent as possible from other men and as dependent as possible on the state.⁴⁶⁸

Thus, in Poulantzas's view, the individuality of the citizen goes hand in hand with the totalitarianism of the state. Juridico-political ideology holds that the political realm encompasses the whole of human life, and it accepts no limits to its involvement in all aspects of human activity, including political life. This situation contrasts sharply with earlier eras. On the other hand, this is not a defining characteristic of capitalist ideology. We should use the concept of hegemony to describe the domination of subordinate classes under class leadership, a class fraction that manages to present itself as representing the common interest. Poulantzas is not at all clear here. First he argues that this form of ideology is new, and permeates all aspects of society. Then he contradicts himself by arguing that ideologies have always done this, whether it be slave society or feudal formations. We are used to his entering complexity into the argument. Contradictions and subtlety we can fully

⁴⁶⁶ Using a familiar trope that asserts we all know what is going on, Poulantzas uses the term 'we need only mention' three times on page 212 to discuss the rise of capitalist ideology, to announce three separate arguments.

⁴⁶⁷ Poulantzas (pages 219-221) starts his alphabetizing strategy here again in setting out the characteristics of ideology, but it only amounts to parts a and b. The attempt to formalize, to structure, the create theory as a mathematical formula, is continuous.

⁴⁶⁸ Rousseau is cited in page 219, though the original citation is missing.

admit. But this appears no more than a confusion, a working out of ideas on the page without a useful conclusion. Confusing or not, he now turns to the issue of legitimacy:⁴⁶⁹

*By legitimacy of political structures and institutions we can designate their relation to the dominant ideology in a formation. In particular legitimacy covers the specifically political impact of the dominant ideology.*⁴⁷⁰

Modern political science suggests that legitimacy refers to the way the political system is accepted by individuals, and now, after Weber, this view becomes part of the functionalist problematic. The ideological becomes the key instance in a given social formation. Legitimacy of political structures thus refers to their embeddedness in the functioning of society, their acceptance by agents, and their valuing in society as a whole. Poulantzas here refers to Almond and Verba's classic political-scientific tome, *The Civic Culture*, a cornerstone of orthodox teaching in American universities in the 1960s', just as this legitimacy was collapsing in the United States.⁴⁷¹ When political structures do not coincide with normative structures, they are declared dysfunctional, badly integrated into society. The problems with such an approach are obvious - Poulantzas points out three. First, the 'over-estimation of the ideological', and the inability to deal with conflict. The Marxist problematic is perfectly suited to dealing with conflict, but for functionalism there is nowhere to go. Second, what results from such an argument is a typology of political structures based on legitimacy, which comes close to Weber's understandings. Third, we can give no account of the co-existence of several forms of legitimacy in the same social formation.⁴⁷²

Marxist theory can readily cope with such problems, he argues. Poulantzas seems to, for the moment, have neglected the failure of functionalist theory to deal with change, expressing as it does a vision of early 1960's American capitalism as a hermetically sealed, and thoroughly victorious, thousand year capitalist Reich in which all problems have been solved, everything has been agreed to, and the political and the ideological go forward hand in hand. This thesis was to be dramatically tested, if not completely discarded, by the crisis of the Vietnam war, the issue of civil rights, and the emergence of the counterculture, founded on a denial of state legitimacy. His assessment on this issue may come later, but it seems an obvious elision for the moment. Instead Marxism is professed to have the capacity to deal with this and many other complexities. In the Marxist view, political domination is not only accepted by the dominated classes, but also by the dominant group as well. This sounds profoundly functionalist itself, but this understanding is based on visions of class struggle and resistance. The dominated classes may not have class consciousness, but they often live in conditions of ideological revolt against orthodoxy. They may demand other forms of political democracy not presently available. This suggests a way of participating in the orthodoxy of the system while at the same time resisting it. It may present itself in the rise of new icons, new images, new cults. As well, in any given state, there exists a dominant ideology, but also forms of legitimacy that derive from other sources, such as monarchical legitimacy. A complex set of ideological relations is thus formed under the hegemony of the ruling class.

How does the capitalist state use violence in maintaining the functioning of the state?⁴⁷³ Clearly, the state is no mere instrument of the ruling class, yet clearly, in the last instance, the state has immense repressive force at its disposal. The term 'force' refers to the institutions of physical repression, such

⁴⁶⁹ Pages 221-224.

⁴⁷⁰ *PPSC*, Page 221. Italics in the original.

⁴⁷¹ G. Almond, and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963.

⁴⁷² *PPSC*, 222-223.

⁴⁷³ *PPSC*, Pages 225-228.

as the army, the police and the prison system. Under capitalism, the state functions through 'consent reinforced by coercion'.⁴⁷⁴ But this is often true of power relations, so this does not define the specific qualities of capitalism. In Gramsci's understanding, force is exerted in political society, hegemony in civil society. But this depends on a historicist understanding, and suggests an 'automatic' movement in society based on economic laws.

The state certainly holds '*the monopoly of organized physical repression*',⁴⁷⁵ a definition that is Weber's, and certainly organized coercive power rests with the state. The use of this power accords with the notion that the state acts in the public interest, and that it acts in this coercive way only when the public interest is threatened. The repressive state is subject to the authority of public opinion, tribunals, juries and the entire juridico-political structure. And the use of this power can only occur through the instrumentality of the state, and cannot be seen as a direct weapon of class domination. Thus the state can be seen still to be acting in the public interest, even while these instruments of repression are used on behalf of the dominant power bloc.

How does the capitalist state and the dominant power bloc connect? In capitalist societies, it must be remembered that the dominant class fractions also need to be organized under the management of the state – this line of reasoning follows Gramsci. Several modes of production may co-exist under capitalism, and thus several dominant classes and class fractions may still remain. To develop unity among dominant interests, it is useful to employ Gramsci's notion of the power bloc. Thus the state is seen to be the only possible mechanism by which a power bloc can evolve. This is a point repeatedly developed by Marx.⁴⁷⁶ According to Marx, universal suffrage is the mechanism that creates the space within which the power bloc can be established. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the large landowners become capitalist ground-renters. They constitute, in effect, a fraction of the dominant bourgeois class. Clearly feudal relations have dissolved, and the land has become merely another location in which profit can be generated. Thus, the old feudal landlords become a new fraction of the developing bourgeoisie. This shift in class position complicates the elements of the class structure that will come to constitute the power bloc. And, at the same time, the newly-forming bourgeoisie themselves are divided. Several ways of developing capital are evolving, and thus various fractions of capitalists emerge – the commercial, financial and industrial fractions are the most obvious. The power bloc develops over time to take control of the political practices of society. The state may then enter a series of régimes, and certainly Marx pointed out two periods: in the first period, the contradictions between certain fractions of the ruling class are evident. Marx talks of the 'exclusive domination' by one class or class fraction during this time.⁴⁷⁷ And during this time, feudal interests, monarchical interests or the financial aristocracy may be in charge, as was the case in mid-19th Century France. The parliamentary state that followed was a bourgeois republic that brought together key elements of the ruling classes, along with all the subordinate classes of society.⁴⁷⁸ But in this analysis Marx does not make use of the concept of power bloc, preferring instead the term 'fusion', a term borrowed from the physical sciences. But the power bloc cannot be simply seen as a form of fusion. The notion of a power bloc does not refer to a harmonious synthesis, but rather a complex contradiction in unity, much less stable, far from resolved. This is the thesis of hegemony. There is no harmonious coming together of various

⁴⁷⁴ PPSC, 225. Gramsci, quoted by Poulantzas. 'legitimacy' is misspelled on page 225.

⁴⁷⁵ Italics in the original, PPSC, page 226.

⁴⁷⁶ PPSC, 230. The citations to Marx are from '*The Eighteenth Brumaire*'.

⁴⁷⁷ PPSC, 236.

⁴⁷⁸ Poulantzas is quoting Marx in the Eighteenth Brumaire, from *MESW*, 1970, pages 110-111.

interests and a sharing of power. Instead one class or class fractions comes to dominate. Thus the power bloc comprises a complex unity under the hegemony of a particular class or class fraction. In addition, we must remember that the class struggle is continually present. Poulantzas is keeping in mind the fluid and dynamic nature of the state as it expresses not just the struggles between dominant elements, but also between these classes and a range of subordinate classes and class fractions. This will lead him to suggest, at a later date, that the state itself is a social relation, rather than a social structure.

The formation of a power bloc is not accidental. It results from the institutionalized power of the developed capitalist state, and the establishment of the power bloc, and its continuance is a major function of the bourgeois state. The public interest is thus represented, even as the new society establishes itself on the basis of domination and exploitation. Poulantzas is at pains to distinguish the concept of power bloc from that of 'alliance'. By 'alliance' is meant both a unity and a contradiction.⁴⁷⁹ But they differ in two ways – first, the power bloc only relates to the dominant classes and class fractions, and not to relations between the power bloc and other classes ; second, different kinds of unity are connected with the two terms. For example, a political alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and the power bloc may also be combined with an intense economic struggle. In the case of the power bloc, unity is extended across political, economic and ideological dimensions. Thus the power bloc comprises a class or class fraction that holds hegemony ; a series of classes and class fractions that are associated with this leading element ; and a particular set of contradictions and relations of force.⁴⁸⁰

Marx fell back on the use of the 'supporting classes' to refer to groups, such as small landholders, who might support a power bloc. By this phrase he meant that this support was not based on a particular 'political sacrifice', but rather comes from what Poulantzas calls *ideological illusions*. Often this supporting class registers support of the power bloc because of fear of the working class. Thus it is often the small peasantry or the petty bourgeoisie who fill this category. In these instance, the state will often act as an intermediary to bring this alliance into being. The state can be seen as above the class struggle, and serving the public interest, and thereby, by inference, a barrier to the further interests of the working class. This alliance results from the inability of this class to develop their own political organization and a distinct political ideology.⁴⁸¹

This section comprises another element in the ongoing debate with Marx, who is there as a constant theoretical touchstone in the background, as Poulantzas develops his arguments. This debate continues, with the use of extensive quotes from Marx, as Poulantzas starts to form his theory of periodization. In Marx, he finds writing about two important periods in the formation of the bourgeois state – the first referring to the '*form of the state*' and the '*power bloc*', the second covered by the concept of the '*forms of régime*'.⁴⁸² In the second period, Marx is referring to the struggles between political parties. Political suffrage :

... precipitates the formation of numerous classes in the political scene, precisely because, in the concrete circumstances studied by Marx, it constitutes one of the factors contributing to the organization of certain classes into parties.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ *PPSC*, 241.

⁴⁸⁰ This summarizes a series of arguments Poulantzas makes on page 242.

⁴⁸¹ *PPSC*, 244-245.

⁴⁸² *PPSC*, 246.

⁴⁸³ *PPSC*, 247.

But political parties are not in themselves social forces, and, as Marx has already suggested, a space emerges in which these political parties seek to express social forces without necessarily having the organization skills to achieve this aim. Thus there is a dislocation between a classes' political interests and their capacity to organize them through political parties.

Gramsci had earlier made the point in Italy that there could exist a difference between the class or fraction in charge of the state (in this case the petty bourgeoisie) and the hegemonic class, the bourgeoisie. This latter class, Poulantzas notes, following Marx, is simply the one from which the personnel of the state are recruited, and that holds the 'heights' of the state.⁴⁸⁴ In various situations, these classes may be one and the same, in other situations, they may be different. Class relations cannot be reduced to party relations.

In Part Four, Poulantzas comes to consider 'The Unity of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the Capitalist State.'⁴⁸⁵ In my view, this section constitutes the heart of his original theoretical argument. Again, Poulantzas is on the conceptual warpath, tidying up the theoretical ramblings of the writers of the past, patching and adding to what already exists, and developing new constructions for future analysis. His endless attempts at precision and clarity frequently fail. The careful reader is baffled by pages of obtuse, unclear and repetitive text which sometimes does not yield to the most careful of readings. Yet beyond this considerable confusion, there is an originality in his thinking that is breath-taking.

He begins this section with further attempts at clarity. Indeed, he takes on the scolding tone of the 19th. Century schoolteacher when he says :

... no-one should be allowed to use these notions (of unity proper and relative autonomy) unless their precise meaning is specified. In order to pin down these ideas, I shall start by making some preliminary working definitions ...⁴⁸⁶

By '*unity proper*' he means the particular way in which a capitalist state presents a *specific* internal cohesion.⁴⁸⁷ It prevents the sharing of state power between the classes and class fractions. This seems to Poulantzas to be unique to the capitalist state. And by relative autonomy, he means :

... the state's relation to the field of the class struggle, in particular its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the classes and fractions of the power bloc, and by extension vis-à-vis its allies and supporters.⁴⁸⁸

In this new conception, Poulantzas wants to distinguish his argument very clearly from 'simplistic and vulgarized' conceptions of the state that see the state merely as the tool or instrument of the dominant class.⁴⁸⁹ There is a close connection between these two conceptions, of course because it is the function of the capitalist state, at one and the same time, to maintain a profile of unity while maintaining its relative autonomy from capitalist interests. The instrumentalist theory has often predominated in the past in which the state is seen to have no autonomy :

⁴⁸⁴ PPSC, 249.

⁴⁸⁵ PPSC, pages 253-321.

⁴⁸⁶ PPSC, page 255.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. The italics are in the original.

⁴⁸⁸ PPSC, 256.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

The state, unified by this (ruling) class's single will for domination is merely its inert tool.⁴⁹⁰

Of most importance is the relationship between class struggle and the state. Within the state's structures lies the whole ensemble of class practices.

Marx and Engels had much to say on the characteristics of the capitalist state. But their writing is not always clear, the scientific concepts not always well elucidated, and the ambiguities commonplace.⁴⁹¹ But there is also a concerted theoretical attempt to understand the nature of the newly-evolving state. We can see the steps in the formation of this new structure, and the major elements of it as well. In this context, Bonapartism and the rise of the French state is a seminal example. Poulantzas quotes Engels in this regard :

Bonapartism is after all *the real religion of the bourgeoisie*. It is becoming ever clearer to me that the bourgeoisie has not the stuff in it for ruling directly itself, and that therefore ... a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form; it upholds the big material interests of the bourgeoisie (even against the will of the bourgeoisie) but allows the bourgeoisie no part in the power of government.⁴⁹²

France is conceived as having an advanced political state, while Britain is accepted as being in an advanced economic condition. What is immediately apparent in this account of Bonapartism is the relative autonomy of the state from economic interests. The relative autonomy seems to stem from a historical moment discussed by Marx in *The Civil War in France*, in which the 'bourgeoisie have already lost, the working class had not yet gained, the ability to govern the nation'.⁴⁹³ But we must remember that Bonapartism is a state already under control of the bourgeoisie, and an account of the state as a state in equilibrium is clearly insufficient. But Marx does not really admit to a state of equilibrium. Gramsci comes close to agreeing with Marx that while the bourgeoisie had already lost the opportunity to govern the nation, the working class could not yet grasp it. But neither Gramsci's notion of Caesarism and catastrophic equilibrium, a form of equilibrium that end in crisis, nor a theory of general equilibrium can explain Bonapartism. Instead we must look to the inherent qualities of the capitalist state and the shaping of relative autonomy within it.

There are many misconceptions regarding the nature of the state and state power. They include (i) an under-estimating of the political, in which the political is reduced to the economic or the economic is merged into the political (ii) A lack of an idea of the unity of state power (iii) a lack of a theory of relative autonomy, and (iv) a lack of a concept of class struggle.⁴⁹⁴ These remarks merely rehash the author's already clear intentions for his newly-emerging theory of the state.⁴⁹⁵ Given these elisions in the literature, it is impossible for these authors to provide a 'scientific concept' of the class struggle. The state is poorly defined, and its functions unclear. Its internal unity is not understood, and there is a vague sense of a balance of forces that is not fully explicated.

⁴⁹⁰ PPSC, 257.

⁴⁹¹ PPSC, 257-258.

⁴⁹² PPSC, 258-259, Engels, in a letter to Marx dated March 13, 1866.

⁴⁹³ The quotation is not further specified, but is cited on page 259.

⁴⁹⁴ These remarks are made on pages 263-264 at the beginning of a chapter called 'Some Misinterpretations and their Consequences', pages 262ff.

⁴⁹⁵ Poulantzas again refers to a whole set of problems that he chooses to ignore for the sake of brevity. He has taken this line several times before in the present text. He comments : 'I shall spend no further time on this point ...' (264) (this refers to functionalist accounts of the welfare state.) This is somewhat bewildering given the extensive exposition he has given to other problems in the literature, but perhaps we should be grateful for small mercies.

The neo-liberal school attaches itself to the concepts of equilibrium and pluralism. In this vision, the state is merely an institution in which a balance of power is played out. The automatic and natural equilibrium of the market is replaced by an equilibrium of 'mixed powers in the technological-industrial society'.⁴⁹⁶ Neither the concept of the unity of power, nor the theory of relative autonomy can have any place in such a theory. Nor does the neo-corporate alternative offer much promise.⁴⁹⁷ While such theorizing admits to worrying antagonisms, no discussion of class struggle is possible. Instead the argument is proposed of the state as an enlightened agent acting to harmonize these conflicting interests. The state is seen as authorising and enabling these interests ; cooperation and arbitration are the themes of this process. Does such an approach admit to theories of unity and relative autonomy? The image of unity is the unity of the institutionalised powers, and the understanding that economic powers are absorbed into the state. Both lines of argument fail to delimit the political and the economic.

Marxist political theory is not untouched by such trends in theory elsewhere. And these kinds of theories have a long history, which it is useful to recall. The institutionalist-corporatist theories had their influence on the German social democratic movement during the Weimar Republic. The state was seen as the agent of harmonization, representing a 'constellation of interests'.⁴⁹⁸ The working class became incorporated into the Nazi state without any form of power-sharing. There is a strong current of theorising the 'revolution from above', following Bismarckism, a line of reasoning that suggests the state taking an enlightened direction. But this argument does not see the state as a neutral arbitrator. Indeed there are elements of a state exhibiting a condition of relative autonomy, as when the Bismarck state moved Prussia from a state of feudalism to a state ready for capitalism. If today⁴⁹⁹ we are in a state of monopoly capitalism, the next step might be the transition to socialism. But this would mean that the state, in its planning and nationalization strategies, would be in advance of economic interests. This would exactly parallel the case of Prussian feudalism. For this to happen, there needs to be sufficient force on the side of the working class to balance that of the bourgeoisie. But these arguments are doubtless wrong, both about Bismarck and about the contemporary situation.

While these tendencies have sometimes crept into the Marxist lexicon, the traditional Marxist view of the state has been to see it merely as an instrument or tool of capital.⁵⁰⁰ Poulantzas is following Althusser here in suggesting that the Marxist theoretical toolbox has been contaminated by ideological tendencies seeping into the pure realm of Marxist scientific thought. Indeed, there appears to him to be a lack of a scientific theory at all when it comes to the monopoly capitalist stage of development.

We now turn to a consideration of the capitalist state and class struggle.⁵⁰¹ Capitalism places the state in a relatively autonomous position in relation to the economic system.⁵⁰² The state acts as an agent of unity even as it separates individuals into private citizens, with rights, responsibilities and

⁴⁹⁶ Poulantzas's wording, page 267.

⁴⁹⁷ *PPSC*, 267ff.

⁴⁹⁸ *PPSC*, 270.

⁴⁹⁹ 1968.

⁵⁰⁰ *PPSC*, page 273.

⁵⁰¹ Chapter three in this section is entitled 'The Capitalist State and the Field of the Class Struggle'.

⁵⁰² This is clearly a repetition of an argument Poulantzas has rehearsed several times before. Indeed he rehearses much here of what has already been set out. The state in capitalism separates individuals out, only to cohere them simultaneously under the state of the public interest, and so on.

recourse to justice under the newly-forming juridico-political system. And not just the dominated classes are separated. As the new state emerges, the dominant classes are also separated, disorganized and confused. The state's has a role here, too, and it is to establish a power bloc under the hegemony of the ruling fractions. This process occurs to shield the real class interests of the participants from their view.

The petty bourgeoisie and the small peasants still remain as vestiges of a previous mode of production from an earlier era. Class struggle and the state are connected in two ways, both through economic and political relations. The state presents itself as the public unity of society, the people-nation. It represents the political power of class unity, and, therefore, in a sense, has its *own class unity*.⁵⁰³ It can represent itself as a national-popular state, not representing any class interest in particular, but rather the nation as a whole. It therefore has a significant ideological purpose which concerns the legitimacy of the state. This does not mean the state is reduced to having an ideological function, but it does have a powerful ideological purpose is establishing the authority and power of the new state structure.

The notion of national sovereignty is already present in our understandings of the absolutist state, where it suggests a unitary structure, in which the state has gained autonomy from the economic realm. Even here, citizens are formally free and equal, and they constitute the foundation of state legitimacy. The state and popular sovereignty are seen as identical terms, but only if the people are represented. The state's unity is also founded in the juridico-political system.

Under the second Bonaparte, according to Marx, the state is able to create independence for itself.⁵⁰⁴ But is unclear whether he saw the state as a class instrument, or as a 'relation of forces'. The question remains as to how the state organizes its unity, a unity of class power. Marx appears to understand that a dislocation has occurred between the political and economic class struggle. But perhaps more importantly, what has also occurred is that the state has developed autonomy from the political interests of the ruling class. The state thus represents the unity of class power. But why, exactly, is relative autonomy required? Marx and Engels propose that in the case of Bonapartism, that the bourgeoisie were incapable of undertaking the task of managing the state. They could not create political parties that could rise to the level of hegemonic organization.⁵⁰⁵ It is as if political life just got in the way of business – there was no time for organizing public life when the necessity for selfishness and self-interest was predominant. Thus the bourgeoisie 'sinks into fractional struggles',⁵⁰⁶ and cannot emerge from the problems of the past. In this vacuum, the capitalist state 'takes charge', and in this move, establishes its relative autonomy. The state then moves to manage the various fractions of the dominated classes, but also manage the struggles between the various competing elements of the ruling class.⁵⁰⁷ Thus the dominant classes must accept a series of compromises to ensure the stability of the system, thereby allowing resources to flow to subordinate interests, ensuring their loyalty to the state, while also maintaining the capitalist nature of the social formation. Thus we are reminded that the relatively autonomous state organizes the ruling class elements, at the same time disorganizing the dominated classes such that they do not organise into a revolutionary political party. The state must also act to incorporate, or be

⁵⁰³ Poulantzas's phrase, and his italics, page 276.

⁵⁰⁴ *PPSC*, 280. There is much repetition of argument on pages 277-279. A misspelling occurs on page 280. 'anlayses' appears in the second paragraph.

⁵⁰⁵ *PPSC*, 284.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *PPSC*, 285. There is endless repetition of the same argument in these pages.

understood to incorporate, more accurately, the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and the small peasants, which Lenin referred to as ‘the ocean of small-scale producers’.⁵⁰⁸ This means that :

State power is not a machine or an instrument, a simple object coveted by the various classes; nor is it divided into parts which, if not in the hands of some, must automatically be in the hands of others; rather it is an ensemble of structures.⁵⁰⁹

The state sets the limits on the class struggle. But this does not establish an equilibrium of forces.

What of the totalitarian state? Often modern political theory has used the case of the totalitarian state as typical of capitalist states, and this is clearly a misguided approach. Often the approach has compared it to liberal capitalist states. Dictatorships are seen to depend on the theory of mass society. In dictatorships, the individual is subsumed into the state. In liberal capitalism, the individual is celebrated and supported. In dictatorship, the class struggle disappears into a homogenized society. This means :

... total acquisition by state power of all the spheres of individual activity. Absorption of the private domain into the womb of the state Behemoth; a complete non-participation of the individual in the political, the individual becoming a mere cog in this monstrous new Leviathan.⁵¹⁰

The modern capitalist state gains its legitimacy from representing the unity of the nation-state, created through the foundation of individual citizens. It is here that it separates itself from various forms of despotism. Yet even despots worked within certain limits of power. The totalitarian state separates the political from the economic, thus separating the individual from the class struggle, and enabling the state to move beyond the class struggle. But while the totalitarian state seems to subsume class struggle and the individual into its structure, it is still a class state. But it is important not to label every capitalist state as somehow, or in part, totalitarian. This leads to an imprecision which makes analysis impossible. The term is vague and uncertain, and it refers simply to ‘a particularly ‘strong’ character of state power’.⁵¹¹ Use of the terms, Poulantzas argues, prevents us from developing a scientific terminology that would be more useful. And the differences between liberal states and totalitarian states, are, in any event, overblown.⁵¹²

Poulantzas now turns his attention the capitalist state and the dominant classes. Here he remains in Marx’s theoretical pocket – the entire book now seems to on the character of a debate with Marx, rather than a reformulation in any completely original sense. He begins by repeating his own earlier remarks on the power bloc – that it derives from the co-existence of various ruling elements, some from previous modes of production, others from the rising bourgeoisie, and especially from the commercial, industrial and financial fractions. The power bloc is not a fusion, but rather a contradictory unity of various classes and class fractions to form a hegemonic force. It does not comprise a sharing out of the state ; instead the state holds together in its unity. As ever, the state establishes its autonomy from the power bloc even as it acts to secure the permanence of this structure.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁸ Cited by Poulantzas on page 288, with no further reference.

⁵⁰⁹ *PPSC*, 288.

⁵¹⁰ *PPSC*, 291

⁵¹¹ *PPSC*, 294, his phrasing.

⁵¹² *PPSC*, 295

⁵¹³ There is much repetition here, as Poulantzas seeks to cement his theoretical gains in place. However, it is striking that he never lets go of Marx, and to a lesser extent Lenin, and attempt to strike out on a more independent line. It is as

Struggles within the dominant classes ensure that the power bloc is permanently unstable. It is this instability that leads to the relative autonomy of the state. Elite theory would argue that due to the instability of contemporary elites that power in capitalism is shared. But this argument stems from a basic misunderstanding of ruling fractions – they have never been stable and homogenous. Indeed it is the working class who have had a coherent political life, strong political parties to represent them, and a sense of solidarity. But the political parties of the bourgeois class are never able to bring coherence, and the role of the state is to provide the necessary coherence to this class.⁵¹⁴ It is also mistaken to argue that in the past the state represented the bourgeois class as a whole, and that the contemporary capitalist state represents only the interests of monopoly capital. In both cases, a variety of fractions of the bourgeoisie are represented by the state.

Relative autonomy may take on several forms :

The state, may, for example, present itself as the political guarantor of the interests of various classes and fractions of the power bloc against the interests of the hegemonic class or fraction, and it may sometimes play off those classes and fractions against the latter. But it does this in its function of political organizer of the hegemonic class or fraction and forces it to admit the sacrifices necessary for its hegemony. To say, therefore, as in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the state is the managing committee for the common affairs of the bourgeoisie in its ensemble is both correct and insufficient: it is insufficient if it makes us lose sight of the state's complex role vis-à-vis the power bloc, and its particular relation to the hegemonic class or fraction.⁵¹⁵

Again, as many times before, we witness Poulantzas in debate with Marx. Is Marx simply serving up the instrumentalist theory of the state? It is hard to deny the clarity of the exposition, but if he is, then Poulantzas is quick to show the shortcomings of the formulation.

Poulantzas then turns his attention to the theory of the separation of powers, by which he refers to the distinction commonly made between the legislative, parliamentary and executive branches of the capitalist state. Usually one of these powers is the dominant power in a given society. It comprises the 'nodal point'⁵¹⁶ at which power is concentrated. Sometimes these elements of the political system reflect the power of certain class fractions, as in the case of the Louis Bonaparte coup discussed by Marx, in which the financial fraction controlled the executive, and the industrial fraction controlled the legislature.⁵¹⁷ But in any of these cases, it is important to remember that the unity of the state is assured by the maintenance of the hegemonic bloc.

What forms of state are possible? This question, along with the forms of régime, is taken up in chapter five.⁵¹⁸ There are several technical issues to consider, including the role of the executive, and what it includes, commonly the state apparatuses, including the bureaucracy, administration, police, and the army.⁵¹⁹ This must be separated from the work of the constitutional assemblies. The

if he sitting side-by-side with Marx at a desk, and they are putting the finishing touches to Marx's undoubted masterpieces.

⁵¹⁴ *PPSC*, 299. Thus is much repetition in the text here.

⁵¹⁵ *PPSC*, 301-302.

⁵¹⁶ *PPSC*, 303. Poulantzas's phrase.

⁵¹⁷ *PPSC*, 305. The reference is to *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, and *The Class Struggles in France*, though no further details are provided.

⁵¹⁸ *PPSC*, pages 308-321,

⁵¹⁹ This is the list provided by Poulantzas on page 308.

relationship between these two branches and the dominance of one over the other suggests different forms of political and economic relationships. Forms of state relate to certain moments in the transformation of the state. Many of these changes and forms of state result from the particular qualities of the class struggle. And the distinction between the legislative and executive dimensions of the state does not determine the forms of the state – again, the class struggle is central here in its familiar guise in which the state manages the power bloc and disorganizes the dominated classes. Different forms of legitimacy result from various social formations that may appear. In those societies in which parliament predominates, legitimacy make take the form of legality - rule-making, in which the general will of the people is seen to be represented. In these cases, the legitimacy of the executive is handled in a particular way. Parliamentary publicity decreases, and a mask of secrecy hides the role of the bureaucracy, and, at the same time, the charismatic leader is brought forward as the leader of the nation.

A long tradition of working class politics has expressed distrust in the executive form of government. Parliamentary legitimacy is thus seen as the only legitimate form of bourgeois government, and thereby it sees a state dominated by an executive as a ‘deformation of the national-popular-class-state’.⁵²⁰ But in fact such a view is clearly false. A parliamentary democracy is no closer to a popular-class nation state than one dominated by the executive. It does not represent the popular will of the people any better than a state governed by a sovereign or an Emperor, as is made clear by the example of Louis Bonaparte.

Executive legitimacy is often masked by a series of devices borrowed from the parliamentary régime. But both are the same type of state. Neither is directly determined by the nature of the class struggle. Parliament may be seen as a ‘place of danger’ to the dominant class because it is a place where the popular will may prevail – it may be taken over by the popular classes. Thus the executive/legislative distinction provides security for the power bloc, since if parliament is taken by storm, then the center of power can be moved to the executive. But the dominant class has many ruses available to it to resist popular domination, and this movement from the parliamentary to the executive wing rarely takes place. There may have been anxieties about this event occurring at one time, but the role of the social democrats put paid to this anxiety for the most part. None the less, the displacement of the dominant node of authority from parliament to the executive branch is a significant way of distinguishing various forms of state. It may signify a change in the fraction of the hegemonic bloc gaining control. In such a case, hegemony may come to be organized within the structure of the executive. Forms of state depend on the role of parties in the power bloc. They are linked very closely to the nature of class struggle in the power bloc. The rise of the executive can lead to the diminution of political parties, and the rise of pressure groups. The rise of the executive branch often results in the substantial failure of monopoly capital to secure hegemony over the nation-state.

Where are the centres of power in the various state forms?⁵²¹ The *centres of political power*⁵²² include the legislative assemblies, the administration, the army, the police, the judiciary and various other locations. In modern societies, there are many such centres of power, all of which are concentrated in the executive. The state still remains relatively autonomous, but monopoly capitalism controls society through the executive. But dislocations can still occur. Even when the hegemonic fraction

⁵²⁰ PPSC, page 312. This is the phrase Poulantzas uses.

⁵²¹ This question is posed on page 315.

⁵²² Ibid. The italics and the phrase appear in the original.

concentrates itself in the executive, parliament may still claim to have authority as the governing authority through the popular will. Often such a crisis develops that a new national agenda emerges that allows legitimacy to flow back both into the legislature, and into the executive branch.

Forms of state and forms of régime should be considered at the same time. It is important here to consider factors such as the predominance or equilibrium between the two branches, and the status of the party system in a particular historical moment. Two kinds of periodization are associated with forms of state and forms of régime. Consider a state with a predominance of the legislative branch, and a multi-party system. In this case, state power could be threatened by the potential for sharing power through the coalition. But usually what is actually at work is a particular form of hegemonic power bloc under the management of the ruling class fraction. And by analysing both forms of state and forms of régime we can assess the state of relative autonomy in a given formation. As a case in point, the predominance of the executive often implies an increase in the autonomy of the state, but only when parties decline, such as in the case of French Bonapartism. It occurs when there is a crisis of representation among the parties.⁵²³ And relative autonomy may be more important in a parliamentary system, where a multi-party polity exists, rather than a two-party system, where internal discipline is strong. In the case of a two-party system, monopolies may exert a certain capacity to rule, and thus the relative autonomy of the state is less important, since the whole power bloc is tied together in a single party :

The hegemonic fraction becomes the *ruling* fraction by occupying the 'heights' of this or these parties by means of its 'agents'; ... this is clearly the case in the USA where the parties' weakened organization has sometimes allowed a relative autonomy of the state, which came into play in Roosevelt's 'New Deal' ... and in the particular case of the 1945 Labour Government in Britain.⁵²⁴

Poulantzas ends this discussion of the relative autonomy of the state with a reference to Ralph Miliband, and this is suggestive, because he is soon going to engage with Miliband in the pages of *New Left Review* on the nature of the state in the familiar Poulantzas/Miliband exchange.⁵²⁵ He then turns his attention to the issue of bureaucracies for the rest of the book,⁵²⁶ and the reader senses that the author has largely made his case, and that the substance of the argument, resting as it does on the exposition of his theory of relative autonomy, has been presented, and that he has now gone down a theoretical cul-de-sac. My own analysis will be pointed, and I will examine this question of the theoretical cul-de-sac in what follows.

We start by following Poulantzas into what seems to be a detailed review of bureaucracy and the state, using Weber as the primary touchstone. First, we examine elite theory.⁵²⁷ Here two issues are of importance – the question of the politically dominant class and the question of the bureaucracy. The question of the bureaucracy leads to two sub-questions – whether the state has an autonomous power, and whether the state can be seen as a 'mere tool' of the capitalist class. Functionalist theory takes the road of cutting off any possibility of class struggle. In this vision, political elites become leaders in the needed places in the social order. The state is said to have its own autonomous power,

⁵²³ Ibid., 320.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 320-321. There is a citation embedded here to Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism*, London, 1964.

⁵²⁵ The debate began in *NLR*, 58, November-December 1969, with a review by Poulantzas of Miliband's book *The State in Capitalist Society*. Basic Books, New York, 1969. Miliband then responds in the next issue (January/February, 1970, issue 59) Further exchanges occurred in the 1970s.

⁵²⁶ Pages 321-359.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 325.

and is engaged in parcelling out political power. Another school of thought centres on the idea of a political class. In this view, there may be several ways to rule. The opportunity may arise through economic domination, or it may result from political control. Unity stems from the wealth of the elites, whether political or economic.

In contrast, Marxism provides fuller answers. But Marxism is critiqued as proposing that the dominant class is determined by the economic. By now, the reader can fully discern that the notion of class refers to an ensemble of social relations, including the political, economic and ideological. Poulantzas then repeats his arguments about the relative autonomy of the state, the power bloc and the unity of state power. In fact, bureaucracy seems to Poulantzas to have two clear meanings in the Marxist texts, the first referring to a social category of the state apparatus, the second to a '*specific system of organization and internal functioning of the state apparatus*'.⁵²⁸ But in any case, the term 'bureaucracy' should refer to the state apparatus, and not to the wider question of state power. On its own, the bureaucracy cannot constitute a separate class since it has no economic base. But it might be construed as a class fraction, since a class fraction can arise from a purely political base. But given that it is embedded in the relations between classes structured into the state, the notion of class fraction is misplaced. The activities of the state are limited by the field of class power.

The state may, however, have class affiliations in the form of its membership. Marx and Engels spoke of 'the heights' of the bureaucracy, which in France were owned by the bourgeoisie, with the lower strata populated by the petty bourgeoisie, and in Germany were directed by the landed aristocracy during the nineteenth century. And indeed Marx and Engels often referred to the particular class fractions from which the 'heights of the bureaucracy' were recruited.⁵²⁹ But this does not mean that bureaucratic functioning is determined by the class origins of its members. It is an agent of state power, and thus the class background of the members is secondary to the place of the bureaucracy in the unfolding of state power. Nor is the bureaucracy merely a tool of the hegemonic fraction. This argument therefore pushes to one side the significance of the fact that members of the economic and political elites belong to the same clubs, the same social circles and the same class, and thus move in harmony to run the economy and the state. Because of the structural location of the state as the unity of power, as the formal representation of the public interest, and the organizer of the power bloc, it remains impervious to these personal interests. It possesses, in the end, relative autonomy. Thus we need not concede that the state is a separate power, nor that it is an instrument of the ruling class.

Class affiliation among the bureaucracy may affect the state's functioning to some degree, though always within the limits set by the class struggle. The political power gained comes from within the state itself, and not from the relations of production.⁵³⁰ These powers set the limits on the class in charge. This is particularly clear in periods of transition, when the bureaucracy has a particular power. In this case, the bureaucracy has a particular access to power, as the social formation is roiled by class conflict. The bureaucracy both aids and hinders the hegemonic bloc. Thus, within limits, the class nature of bureaucratic membership may play a role. In particular, the petty bourgeois nature of the subordinate layers of the state have played a significant part. They come into the bureaucracy because their economic role is reduced under capitalism, and because this allows the dominant class to reconstruct the petty bourgeois class as a supporting class. There are

⁵²⁸ This is Poulantzas's phrase, and the italics are in the original, page 332.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 334-335.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 337.

also ideological reasons, because this particular class has a propensity towards power fetishism, and the state provides a mechanism by which such interests can be realised. And given that the petty bourgeoisie can no longer represent themselves through a political party that directly represents their interests, the state provides an avenue of representation.

What can be said about bureaucracy, bureaucratism and the capitalist state?⁵³¹ Does the bureaucracy take on different forms in different kinds of state, for example? Bureaucratism refers to the tendency towards bureaucratic structures, and to the particular system of organization of the state apparatus. Weber has contributed much to this discussion, but the account remains inadequate.⁵³² Weber argues that bureaucratism is identified by rationality, a system of normative models governing 'various sectors of the capitalist system'.⁵³³ For him bureaucracy itself is the creator of modern political power. Hence, for Poulantzas, Weber is in the business of masking the political power of social classes and class struggle in general. It is, in a very direct way, a form of ideological shading of the truth. But Weber does acknowledge the importance of the state to the capitalist mode of production, and that the state carries within it important contradictions. Functionalism has followed Weber in his analysis. For this school, the bureaucracy is only of interest when a dysfunction arises. This becomes a pathology of the capitalist system. Thus there are functional bureaucracies (good for the system) and dysfunctional bureaucracies (bad for the system), in which case adjustments must be made for the system to be corrected. Weber saw the state as the most rational way to run the system, but he also saw a contradiction between bureaucracy and democracy. Thus he cannot be fully accepted into the leadership of the functionalist camp. Rationality for Weber has two senses.⁵³⁴ In the first instance it merely references the very practical matter of budgetary accounting of the capitalist firm and state. But then rationality is also used in a somewhat vague way, which suggests the weight of a new system bearing down on capitalism. And while Marx, Engels and Lenin sometimes refer to the bureaucracy as a parasite on the body of the capitalist formation, they more commonly speak of contradictions.⁵³⁵ The contradictions for them lie in the relation between the bureaucracy and social classes, including the relation between the bourgeoisie and the relatively autonomous state, as well as the relation between the bureaucracy and the subordinate classes, including classes from other modes of production.

There are homologies between the way that capitalist firms work and the way the bureaucracies work. This results from the dominance of a certain ideological model in a given society. The state has specific ways in which it may intervene in the economic universe. It may serve as a source of employment for a displaced class, as in the case of small peasants driven off the land. But it also acts as a tax collector, and it also acts directly to assist business in the period of monopoly capitalism. As capitalism develops, the state also evolves, develops higher levels of functionality and increases the number of personnel. And it may take on various political qualities. In France, the bureaucracy has always had the characteristic of a social force, but in Britain this has never occurred.

There is a particular quality of the state under capitalism, and this quality lies with its relative autonomy, quite distinct from the state under feudalism. Feudalism depends on administration by

⁵³¹ Chapter three in this section, pages 341-350.

⁵³² Poulantzas continues his theme of correcting the writers of the past with his faint praise of Weber's contribution to state theory and the theory of bureaucracy.

⁵³³ *PPSC* 341, This phrase is Poulantzas's.

⁵³⁴ *PPSC*, 343.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

notables. Class affiliation *does* matter here. As well, the intellectual class comes from this background as well.

Ideology works on bureaucratism in several ways – as a general masking of knowledge through bureaucratic secrecy, through particular forms of capitalist ideology, through the establishment of the juridico-political system as the legitimate face of capitalism, or through the bureaucratic monopoly of knowledge.

Bureaucracy can be said to be a specific social category because it creates a specific unity, and because of its relative autonomy from social classes.⁵³⁶ And bureaucratism has been analysed so frequently that Poulantzas simply rehearses its main features here :

*Bureaucratism represents a hierarchical organization of the state apparatus, by means of a delegation of power, having particular effects on the functioning of that apparatus.*⁵³⁷

It is also associated with the ‘axiomatization’ of the juridical system into rules and laws, the process of centralization, and with the impersonality of state functioning.⁵³⁸ Payment of personnel is by fixed salaries; access is by competition or nomination ; there is a clear separation between public and private life ; a masking of the apparatus is common ; and a masking of senior civil servants in particular is notable. Finally, the senior members of the bureaucracy are highly educated, and the lower orders are not.

In the end, and at this point, Poulantzas appears to suggest here that the bureaucracy is not a specific social category. It may have its own interests in that it provides an avenue for careers, but these interests are not enough to constitute a separate social category because there are a wide array of interests involved throughout the strata.

Finally, in ‘Bureaucracy and the Class Struggle’⁵³⁹, Poulantzas confronts his last topic. Class struggle is at the heart of his concerns, the epicentre of his theoretical and political passions, and he turns to it now as comes to the close of the book. From Marx and Engels, he sees that the relative autonomy of the state is entirely a function of the relation of the state to the class struggle. The bureaucracy has no power of its own, state power is class power, and the state is a power centre. For them, an equilibrium is involved. But Engels clearly feels the bureaucracy can have an independent and separate power, even thinking of it as a class on occasion.⁵⁴⁰ But it is also obvious that relative autonomy is present even when equilibrium is missing, so this is an inadequate account. The bureaucracy, instead, must be seen as a structure with an ensemble of levels all engaged in the class struggle. It is involved with the problems of isolation previously discussed, both for the working class, and the dominant classes, and with the isolation of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Poulantzas appears here to vacillate on his use of the concept of the bureaucracy as a social category. Here he concludes :

In short, the relative autonomy of the bureaucratic category from the dominant classes is related to that of the capitalist type of state ... we can say that the bureaucracy itself as a *social category*, assumes this

⁵³⁶ *PPSC*, 348.

⁵³⁷ *PPSC*, 349. Italics in the original.

⁵³⁸ This listing covers most of pages 349 and 350.

⁵³⁹ Chapter four, pages 351-359.

⁵⁴⁰ *PPSC*, 352.

autonomy, in that it accurately reflects the political power of the dominant classes and represents their interests in the particular economic, political and ideological conditions of the class struggle in these formations.⁵⁴¹

In a turn towards instrumentalism, he appears to assign the bureaucracy to a social category, though what exactly is meant by a social category is unclear, so the importance of this shift is lost to the reader. But now, in a last attempt to resolve the many questions he has raised, he systematizes the rest of the text.⁵⁴²

First, how does the state connect with the bourgeoisie? The question is an entirely political one, and functional theory's notions of dysfunction miss the point entirely. The small scale producers are often overlooked in this analysis, however. This relation of the bourgeoisie to the state has two aspects – the struggle between dominant class ideology and petty bourgeoisie ideology within the state apparatus, and the contradictions between the capitalist state, and the structure imposed on it because of the involvement of the petty bourgeoisie.⁵⁴³

A second set of questions concerns whether the bureaucracy is undemocratic. Does it lead to totalitarianism? The legitimacy of this kind of state is clearly bourgeois legitimacy. This could bear the charismatic character of a 'leader', but that is only one kind of legitimacy. Thirdly, what happens when the state is dominated by the executive. The answer might lie in the question of whether the bureaucracy constitutes a social force. But since it is neither a class or a class fraction, it can in no way constitute the state on its own. Further, although the bureaucracy forms a social category it cannot be a social force, but it can become one. This, of course, depends on the concrete situation and on the situation of the class struggle. In some cases, perhaps, the bureaucracy may act as a social force.

Relative Autonomy, Miliband and Class Struggle

Immediately after publishing this book, and in the shadow of the May-June uprisings in France, Poulantzas reviewed Ralph Miliband's book *The State in Capitalist Society* in *New Left Review*.⁵⁴⁴ He begins by praising the value of the book, hinting at epistemological differences, then focusing on the gap in Marxist theory on issues relating to the state.⁵⁴⁵ We see here a theme that resonates throughout *Political Power and Social Classes*, that of the debate with Marx, teasing out the implications of Marx's theoretical corpus that only requires a little help to provide the fullest account needed of

⁵⁴¹ PPSC, 354. Here we see an instrumentalist turn in the argument, even if the majority of his reasoning has been to criticize such an approach.

⁵⁴² Pages 354-359.

⁵⁴³ We are still back in France in the mid 19th. Century. The French and the German cases are brought up for the hundredth time on page 356, three pages from the end of the book.

⁵⁴⁴ NLR, issue 58, November-December 1969, *The Problem of the Capitalist State*, I review here several articles from *New Left Review*, which provide Poulantzas with an opportunity to expand and summarize his views on the state in relation to his critics, ending with his 1978 article, *Towards a Democratic Socialism*, NLR, 1/109, May-June, 1978, pages 75-87. In between, Miliband replies to the initial review of his book (NLR 1/59, January-February, 1970, pages 53-60), and Poulantzas then responds some years later in *The Capitalist State : a reply to Miliband and Laclau*, NLR 1/95, January-February 1976, pages 63-83. I end with his 1979 interview with *Marxism Today*, July 1979, with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt, 'Interview with Nicos Poulantzas'.

⁵⁴⁵ Poulantzas, 1969, cited above, pages 67-68. Gramsci's work is taken to be an exception here.

the state and social classes. Poulantzas reminds us that Marx proposed that the economic was both dominant and determinant in the last instance within capitalism, but that in the feudal mode of production ideology and religion were dominant, even if the economy was still determinant. Thus, this led to a neglect of the state at the expense of Marx's extensive economic treatments. Poulantzas then rehearses similar lacunae in the work of Lenin and the theoreticians of the Second and Third Internationals. In the latter case, the malady was simply an overwhelming outbreak of economism, and thus the neglect of the state was inevitable. This form of economism simply reduces the other levels of reality to epiphenomena, and thus diminishes them to matters of no consequence.⁵⁴⁶ In the light of this situation, Miliband's work on the state is therefore seen to be of particular value. As an attack on bourgeois theories of the state, Poulantzas applauds the work.

But now Poulantzas gets down to his critical work, and his first assault is on Miliband's epistemology and his focus on concrete cases. He requires of Miliband that he sets out the methodological strategies that he plans to employ before engaging on this kind of work, and he sees nothing that will fit the bill. Indeed, Poulantzas goes so far as to say that Miliband never really says what the state is, and leaves its shape and its form implicit. But more important is the issue of method and epistemology. Poulantzas explains the matter by raising the issue of the relation between theory and the concrete. A marvellous piece of writing from the later 1976 article sums up the Poulantzas position on this dilemma :

... facts can only be rigorously - that is, demonstrably - comprehended if they are explicitly analysed with the aid of a theoretical apparatus constantly employed throughout the length of the text. This presupposes, as Durkheim already pointed out in his time, that one resolutely eschews the demagogy of the 'palpitating fact', of 'common sense' and the 'illusions of the evident'. Failing this, one can pile up as many concrete analyses as one likes, they will prove nothing whatsoever.⁵⁴⁷

By not placing himself fair and square within the realm of Marxist epistemology, Miliband has laid himself open to the claim that he has been caught in the snares of the enemy, that he is playing on their theoretical territory. Poulantzas, in his own work, of course, has done nothing for 355 pages but set out his theoretical territory and the Marxist problematic on the state, with little recourse to 'facts' or evidence at all, so the Miliband project, coming as it does from an empirical direction, is profoundly at odds with the Poulantzian project tout court. Miliband may not have a carefully argued epistemology or an elaborated theory of the state, but Poulantzas has nothing else. He rarely roams into the empirical world at all – unlike Marx somewhat surprisingly – and when he does it is to go back 100 years to Bismarck and Napoleon – hardly a timely attempt to indicate what the contemporary capitalist state might be up to. The divide between them could hardly be more obvious.

Poulantzas expands his critique by arguing that it is the Miliband position that classes are not objective structures but are instead reduced to interpersonal relations.⁵⁴⁸ For Poulantzas, who is clearly in a structuralist moment, individuals are placed in class positions by the mode of production, not by the motivations that might or might not exist within the minds of individuals. This seems like a fundamental distinction between the two authors, at one and the same time epistemological, methodological and empirical, that then colours the rest of the argument. In what remains in the

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., page 68.

⁵⁴⁷ Poulantzas, 1976, op. cit., page 65.

⁵⁴⁸ Poulantzas, 1969, op. cit., page 70.

article, Poulantzas follows a familiar tack of numbering key points, this time to advantage, and he lists five major areas of contention :

1. *Managerialism*.⁵⁴⁹ Poulantzas approves of Miliband taking on the ‘false issue’ of managerialism, the argument that in late capitalism, managers have taken over control of enterprises, and have little interest in profit. Miliband, in contrast to the managerialist line, wants to emphasize that the new category of managers is part of the ruling elite. But, Poulantzas claims, this is a false way to conceive of social class. Marx reminds us that class results from an agent’s objective place in the relations of production, and does not reside in the motivational structure of the individual. Thus managers, in the Poulantzian view, do not constitute a unique fraction of the capitalist class, which is where the focus should be.

2. *Bureaucracy*.⁵⁵⁰ Miliband next confronts the relationship between the state and the ruling class. Miliband is at pains to argue against the prevailing orthodoxy that the state is class-neutral. Again, he takes an opposite position, arguing that often the capitalist class has provided membership for state offices, and that personal ties between the ruling class and senior members of the state are widespread. But again it must be pointed out that the relationship between the state and the ruling class is an ‘objective one’, and not a matter of personal motivation or class allegiance. Thus the fact that members of the ruling class populate the heights of the bureaucracy is an *effect* of the class structure and its relation to the state, and not its *cause*. And we must now discuss the problem of the bureaucracy. Readers will remember that Poulantzas spends many pages at the tail-end of *Political Power and Social Classes* writing about the bureaucracy, so he has much to say on this topic. In the Poulantzian worldview, the state bureaucracy constitutes a *social category*, and not a class fraction or a social class.⁵⁵¹ The state is thus a servant of the ruling class, not because of the class origins of the members, but because of its role in establishing the unity of the social formation. And while a long Marxist tradition has celebrated the instrumentalist theory of the state as a tool in the hands of the capitalist class, Poulantzas now wants to emphasize that relative autonomy between the ruling class and the state is a more thoughtful description of this relationship. And if this is so, one cannot account for the condition of relative autonomy that prevails if the state has been ‘cornered’⁵⁵² by agents of the ruling class. This approach can only lead to instrumentalism.

3. *The Branches of the Bureaucracy*.⁵⁵³ Poulantzas spends the last fifty pages of *Political Power and Social Classes* considering the role of the bureaucracy, and it is to this problem he returns here. Which branch of the bureaucracy dominates in a particular case? The Miliband argument seems to be that the answer lies in the closeness of the managers of a given sector to members of the ruling class, or the sector most closely tied to an important element of the economy. Again, the two writers are at odds, and again Poulantzas wants to emphasize the objective nature of the state as a system of unity with its own logic. Various forms of state do exist, but these forms must be related back to the nature of the class struggle in any given society.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., pages 71-72.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., pages 72-74.

⁵⁵¹ In fact, his writing is deeply ambiguous on this point, but he does conclude *Political Power and Social Classes* by affirming the bureaucracy as a social category, though expressing the opposite view a few pages before. See his discussion on pages 344-345, and especially his comments on page 350, where he seems to doubt the usefulness of the definition. In the end, he is willing to use this formulation.

⁵⁵² His word is ‘corners’, page 74.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., page 74.

4. *The Present Form of the Capitalist State*.⁵⁵⁴ What, then, does Miliband make of the present capitalist situation? Poulantzas argues that the present (1969) condition of the state is novel, though he does not believe that the state is moving in the direction of a military dictatorship, a view that he seems to imply might be in Miliband's mind. It seems that what Miliband might be proposing is that the state and the ruling class are becoming ever closer, and the state is thus becoming ever more instrumentalist because the agents of the state and the agents of the ruling class are now more or less interchangeable. Poulantzas sees such a view as a close parallel to the orthodox communist view that under state monopoly capitalism, the state and the ruling class become as one. But as he has argued elsewhere, such a view leads to a blunt and crude version of instrumentalism, and neglects the notion of relative autonomy entirely. It is thus profoundly misguided.

5. *The Ideological Apparatuses*.⁵⁵⁵ Finally, Poulantzas turns to ideology, and in this case, he poses an interesting question – perhaps neither Miliband nor he have dealt with this issue adequately. Apart from Gramsci, it is clear in the Marxist lexicon that the emphasis has been on the repressive nature of the state, and with Miliband and Poulantzas, while ideology is examined, nowhere is there a systematic treatment of the *institutional* nature of ideology, the way that ideas are embedded in the structures of the state. When ideology has been considered it has usually been located in external agencies, such as the church. But this is clearly a misplaced argument. Indeed, Poulantzas argues, it would be better to understand that while some structures of the state are repressive, many state apparatuses are largely ideological in nature – state education is the obvious example – but these structures might also include the church, the trade unions, the media and so on. For while some of these agencies formally live outside the state, they often act as if they were state agencies, and indeed, in the case of the media, for example, they comprise a mixture of public and private entities. And these agencies are particularly important because such agencies are especially autonomous. Poulantzas gives four reasons why we should consider these agencies elements of the ideological state apparatus – (i) Such agencies act to unify the social formation, which is the role of the capitalist state (ii) the repressive state apparatus guarantees or denies their existence (iii) while these apparatuses exhibit a high degree of autonomy, they are still influenced strongly (and limited by) changes in the structure of the state, and (iv) if gaining state power in the socialist revolution requires ‘smashing the state’, it also requires taking over the ideological apparatus – the church, the schools, the media – in order to secure full control of the social formation. But this is to go too far for Miliband, Poulantzas argues, for his political conclusions are muted, and revolution is not where the Miliband argument takes us.

Miliband replied to this review in the next issue of NLR.⁵⁵⁶ His reply is shorter than the initial Poulantzas review, rather gentlemanly, but no less critical than the Poulantzas position. Again, he uses a numbering system, which I now follow.

1. *The Problem of Method*. Miliband admits that he hasn't given the problem of method the attention that it probably deserves, but he argues that empirical adjudication is the only possible way forward in many cases, a view that Poulantzas, by failing to use ‘evidence’, theorised or otherwise, often seems to deny. And while he does admit to the use of the term ‘elite’ in his work, he reaffirms that the notion of ruling class remains, and that the use of the term ‘elite’ is really little different from

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., page 75.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., page 76.

⁵⁵⁶ NLR 1/59, January-February, 1970, pages 53-60.

Poulantzas's use of 'class fraction'. The Miliband book 'may be insufficiently theoretical',⁵⁵⁷ but in comparison one might say that the Poulantzas position is insufficiently empirical, and contrasts significantly with Marx's rich empirical tradition embodied in his major works.

2. *The Objective Nature of the State*. Managerialism, in the Miliband view, is underestimated by Poulantzas, and constitutes a significant empirical problem. And Miliband reaffirms the role he assigns to the objective conditions of the state. But he also argues that Poulantzas pays altogether too little attention to the issue. In fact, in *Political Power and Social Classes*, Poulantzas does deal with this matter empirically, as did Marx. And it may be that we catch Poulantzas in a structuralist moment here, in which he is willing to dismiss this issue as entirely irrelevant – that he 'bends the stick too far' in the French phrase. But it cannot be entirely ignored, Miliband claims. Given that Poulantzas seems unwilling to deal with the empirical in any substantive way, it is hardly a surprise, one might imagine Miliband thinking, that he neglects the twin 'concrete-empirical' problems of managerialism and state agents. And then Miliband makes his famous accusation :

... his own analysis seems to me to lead straight towards a kind of structural determinism, or rather a *structural super-determinism*, which makes impossible a truly realistic consideration of the dialectical relationship between the State and 'the system'.⁵⁵⁸

Here is Poulantzas pushed out on a limb, challenged on the issue of theoreticism, a failure to address questions of history and of evidence, and now, also failing to attend to issues of agency, and accused instead of 'structural super-determinism', implying that the agents who actually fill the positions in the state are merely ciphers who carry out the logic of the state bereft of human agency. And Poulantzas is accused of more :

The political danger of structural super-determinism would seem to me to be obvious. For if the state élite is as totally imprisoned in objective structures as is suggested, it follows that there is really no difference between a state ruled, say, by bourgeois constitutionalists, whether conservative or social-democrat, and one ruled by, say, Fascists.⁵⁵⁹

This is a powerful rejection, and one which ignores entirely the subtlety of the Poulantzian argument in *Political Power and Social Classes*, as well as ideas proposed about relative autonomy and fascism in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, the place where this issue is most fully discussed. Of course, *Fascism and Dictatorship* had not yet been published, and it is unlikely at this time that Miliband had fully come to grips with *Political Power and Social Classes* itself. But it is clear that, within the limited terms of this debate, Miliband scores a powerful point here.

3. *The Ideological Institutions*. Miliband gently argues that his treatment of ideology is actually extensive, contra the Poulantzas claim, but that Poulantzas is misguided if he thinks the church, the media, education and the like are all part of the ideological state apparatus. For Miliband, the state itself already plays a very significant role in socialising citizens. The other institutions may be part of the socializing process, but Poulantzas is mistaken to place them within the state. They are subject to state pressure, but they are best considered part of the political arena. Indeed, Miliband claims that such institutions are most effective in their activities of indoctrination when they keep at arm's

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., page 55.

⁵⁵⁸ Op. cit., page 57. My italics.

⁵⁵⁹ Op. cit., page 58.

length from the state in a bourgeois-democratic society, whereas in dictatorships, the connection would be formal and close.

The exchange ends on a political note. Poulantzas has claimed that Miliband stayed away from political conclusions. Miliband accedes to this view. To move towards a democratic-socialist future is clearly important, he replies, but the ways in which this might occur seemed to the author beyond the scope of his book.

This is where the exchange lay until much later. In the early 1970's, Poulantzas published *Fascism and Dictatorship* (1970) and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1973), and it was not until 1976, after the completion of these later works, that Poulantzas finally gave a reply.⁵⁶⁰ He begins by commenting that the initial debate has led to widespread discussion, and that he cannot hope to reply to all the questions raised. He is, however, to answer Laclau's comments, along with the Miliband position. He starts by reiterating that Miliband's theoretical language is so imprecise that it lacks any 'theoretical problematic'. Thus the arguments, as Laclau has suggested, are probably sited on separate theoretical terrains. And Poulantzas goes on to say that he has little to add to his previous criticisms of Miliband, but instead wants to develop his own arguments. Again, as before, he does this under a series of headings :

1. *Abstractionism*.⁵⁶¹ Poulantzas takes exception to Miliband's characterization of his work as hyper-abstracted, by which he takes Miliband to be saying that he won't confront the world of facts. His answer to this charge is sophisticated, though facile. He cleverly uses Durkheim to defend the view that the world of 'common sense' of 'pure facts' cannot be approached innocently, but rather always through a theoretical lens. But then he also argues that *Political Power and Social Classes* is full of empirical referents. The former claim might have some weight if he were in debate with some ardent positivist with no knowledge of epistemology, Marxist or otherwise. But this is not so in the case of Miliband. And, in any case, having established a methodological epistemology, one is then free, as Marx amply shows in his own work, to bring historical and ethnographic evidence to bear on the case at hand. The brilliance of Marx's work, in part, lies in the magnificent way that historical evidence and case studies are joined with elaborate theoretical argument to provide language of remarkable power and influence. Since Poulantzas debates with Marx, not just in the early pages of *Political Power and Social Classes*, but throughout the book, it is surprising that none of this empirical-historical influence rubs off on him, or far less, perhaps, that one might have imagined to enable him to enlarge the power of his own argument. In fact, the most persuasive part of the book is his discussion of the French and German case studies, where the empirical comes into close contact with the theoretical, and the language is lively and persuasive. But for the vast majority of the book, the use of empirical evidence is sketchy, gestural at best, and absent for most of the time. One cannot hide behind the epistemological shadows to avoid historical evidence, nor can one dismiss the 'concrete-real' as being all too obvious if one is to confront political realities, but Poulantzas does this throughout his book. And, curiously, his main point of historical connection is with the 19th. Century, and not with the contemporary capitalist state at all.⁵⁶² Thus his defence is in these two ways thoroughly unconvincing.

⁵⁶⁰ *The Capitalist State : a reply to Miliband and Laclau*, NLR 1/95, January-February 1976, pages 63-83.

⁵⁶¹ Pages 66-66.

⁵⁶² This is exactly the point that Miliband makes in his 1973 review of the English version of *Political Power and Social Classes*. See page 84 in Ralph Miliband, *New Left Review*, 82, November-December, 1973.

He does, however, admit to a certain theoreticism. He attributes this to an overly Althusserian approach to which he found himself subject at the time of writing the book. This overly formal attention to philosophy, to the creation of new concepts as a *form of production* (Generalities 1, Generalities 3, Generalities 3) means that much of the book is taken up with trying to be very clear about the use of terms, setting the historical record straight about how Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci used theoretical constructs, and seeking to establish a ‘scientific’, clear and precise form of analysis. But as he attempts this work, he produces a text of such density, complexity and confusion that he can be said to fail in large part at this task, however original his achievements, and however brilliant his insights. Thus he failed to deal with the ‘concrete-real’ in any serious fashion, and admits, at least to some extent, the error of his ways, and believes he has now rectified his faults.

2. *A Necessary Distinction*. Poulantzas admits to failing to separate the theoretical work, the plan for the establishment of new concepts, and the ‘order of research’, which is the realm in which facts are addressed. In the theoretical realm, apparently, we are in a hermetically sealed space in which concepts and ideas are worked over by Marxist science and new concepts are developed. Then, in the realm of research, ‘facts’ come up against theories, and give rise to concepts.⁵⁶³ This appears contradictory, and Poulantzas gives no satisfactory explanation or defence of this form of exposition within this section.

3. *Formalism*. But none the less, as the defence develops, he does admit to a lack of empirical evidence, of ‘concrete analysis’, a problem ameliorated in *Fascism and Dictatorship* and in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. Thus, while *Political Power and Social Classes* remains slightly diminished by its shortcomings, overall the Poulantzian oeuvre now seems to be on the path to recovery. But in these changes, Poulantzas wants to remain of the view that facts are always suffused with theory, a view that is now widely accepted among advanced theoretical circles, not the least because of Bourdieu’s theoretical and philosophical interventions. But he finds little of analytical value in Miliband’s work :

What we find, mainly, are narrative descriptions, along the lines of ‘that is the way it is’, recalling powerfully to mind the kind of ‘abstractionist empiricism’ that Wright Mills spoke of. One cannot emphasize too heavily the fact that in neglecting theory one ends up failing to notice the concrete.⁵⁶⁴

His own work, he explains, suffers to a considerable degree from the historical conditions of its production, a situation in which few concrete examples were to hand, where the Marxist tradition was largely positivist and economistic, and from which a break needed to be made.

4. *Difficult Language*. Poulantzas admits to the use of overly challenging language. He justifies such a strategy, however, by arguing that he needed to break with existing schemes of thought. But then he takes issue with Miliband’s claim concerning the profound obtuseness of the Poulantzian analytic strategy. Here is the quote he uses from Miliband :

“A class”, Poulantzas says, “can be considered as a distinct and autonomous class, as a social force, inside a social formation, only when its connection with the relations of production, its economic existence, is reflected on the other levels by a specific presence” . . . One must ask what is a “specific presence”? The answer is that “this presence exists when the relation to the relations of production, the

⁵⁶³ Poulantzas, 1976, page 66. This paraphrases Poulantzas, and this section hardly clarifies the situation. It is obvious to the careful reader, however, that Poulantzas has stayed in the realm of theory for much of his exposition in *Political Power and Social Classes*, and that he has rarely strayed into the factual world at all, let alone to assess his theoretical arguments rigorously.

⁵⁶⁴ Op. cit., page 67.

place in the process of production, is reflected on the other levels by *pertinent effects*". What then are "pertinent effects"? The answer is that "we shall designate by 'pertinent effects' the fact that the reflection of the place in the process of production on the other levels constitutes a *new element* which cannot be inserted in the typical frame-work which these levels would present without these elements". This might be interpreted to mean that a class assumes major significance when it makes a major impact upon affairs - which can hardly be said to get us very far. But Poulantzas does not mean even that. For he also tells us, "the dominance of the economic struggle" (i.e. "economism" as a form of working-class struggle - RM) does *not* mean "an absence of '*pertinent effects*' at the level of the political struggle"- it only means "a certain form of political struggle, which Lenin criticizes by considering it as *ineffectual*". So, at one moment a class can only be considered as distinctive and autonomous if it exercises "pertinent effects", i.e. a decisive impact; next moment, the "pertinent effects" may be ineffectual. Poulantzas never ceases to insist on the need for "rigorous" and "scientific" analysis. But what kind of "rigorous" and "scientific" analysis is this? Indeed, what kind of analysis at all?⁵⁶⁵

The quotation is extensive, but the difficulties involved in the exposition will resonate strongly with all those academic heroes and heroines who have made the same long and tortuous journey through the Poulantzian terrain as Miliband has. Poulantzas replies at length and with little advantage, and seems to this reader merely to add to the confusion.

5. *On the Question of Structuralism.* Poulantzas now addresses the 'second'⁵⁶⁶ issue that lies between the two authors. He begins by claiming that nowhere does his adversary define what he means by structuralism, and that thus, as with Marx, Lenin and the rest, he will have to remedy the situation.⁵⁶⁷ He takes from the literature the view that one form of structuralism excludes the actions of agents. He refuses to respond to this claim, arguing that anything he could say here would be fruitless. But then he turns to a second kind of structuralism that he takes more seriously – that of the exclusion of the class struggle from his analysis. This he utterly refutes. Thus the position he is willing to go to the barricades for is not the question concerning individuals and the state, whether they be automaton or no, but to suggest instead that the only form of voluntarism worthy of the name is class struggle. This is entirely consistent with his theoretical work to date, and he then continues on to examine three case studies to make his point.

The headings remain confusing, and the argument is still complicated, but one senses Poulantzas is on firmer ground here. In 'case study one', he looks at the 'relative autonomy of the state'. In this case, he wants to assert that he has made two advances, the first to assert the relative autonomy of the political from the economic, and the second lying in his specification of the classes and class struggle within late capitalism, and especially in his formulation of the power bloc. All this leads him to understand the capability of the state to establish the necessary unity of late capitalism. How autonomous is 'relatively autonomous' asks Miliband? An absurd question, responds Poulantzas, and a question that can only be answered by specific historical circumstances, and this task he feels he has fully completed in his later texts.

In case study two, Poulantzas deals with 'state power and class power'. Miliband seems shocked, apparently, because Poulantzas has not assigned a separate power to the state, but instead has insisted that the state reflects class power. In functionalist orthodoxy, it is always the state and other

⁵⁶⁵ NLR, 82, page 86.

⁵⁶⁶ The numbering is somewhat bemusing, since we have already dealt with abstractionism, difficult language, formalism and a 'necessary distinction' before we come to this point.

⁵⁶⁷ This is truly disingenuous, because Miliband has clearly pointed out that Poulantzas's structuralism has led him to view agents as mere automatons designated to their places by the class structure. This is a facile move to ignore this argument, and to bring the theoretical territory under his control again by substituting his own definition.

institutional powers that hold power. What disappears in these accounts is the role of classes and class struggle. Thus the Poulantzian emphasis on class struggle designates his break with this kind of structuralism. And here he engages in an auto-critique:⁵⁶⁸ he paid too little attention to this matter in *Political Power and Social Classes*, a position he tried to rectify in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. He comes now to a succinct definition of the state as a social relation:

... the State should be seen (as should capital, according to Marx) as a relation, or more precisely as the condensate of a relation of power between struggling classes.⁵⁶⁹

Thus the state is neither a thing or an instrument to be used by the ruling class as it wishes, nor is it a subject with a will of its own. In these opposing arguments, either the state is 'invaded' by the ruling class, or the state invades the social classes. Instead it is more useful to see the state as 'shot through'⁵⁷⁰ with class contradictions. The bureaucracy is thus best seen as a social category which does not stand above classes and class struggle, but rather is embedded in them.

In case study three, Poulantzas turns to fascism and parliamentary democracy.⁵⁷¹ Miliband has claimed that Poulantzas cannot distinguish between fascism and parliamentary democracy, a claim which Poulantzas challenges directly. Instead, he argues that *PPSC* does exactly that, and indeed that he takes pains to make this very distinction. But what it also does is to insist on the relative autonomy of the state in *both cases*. Does anything remain of the charge of 'structuralism'? Poulantzas thinks not, but he does accept further criticisms, and uses Laclau's commentary as a pathway forward.⁵⁷² Laclau starts by criticising Althusserian conceptions of 'instances', which he claims Poulantzas and others put to use, and which leads inevitably to taxonomism and formalism. As well, he argues that the economy appears to have the same meaning in all modes of production, and that the concept of relative autonomy appears to apply only to capitalism. Laclau may be right in some of his commentary, Poulantzas agrees, but it is important to remember that there were several people at work on the same problems within the Althusserian camp, and that there were wide variations on the views expressed. The charge of economism, for example, seems to apply mostly to Balibar, who also under-estimated the significance of class struggles.

Poulantzas ends with five points concerning 'general theory'. (i) He wants to claim that his particular notion of the mode of production solves some problems inherent in the Balibar account, among others, in that it allow him to understand the relationship between various instances (the political, the economic and the ideological) more clearly than competing views. It also allows him to avoid creating a 'general theory of the state', instead limiting himself to outlining a theory of the capitalist state. (ii) None the less, a residue of formalism remains, a formalism that leads to certain errors, including treating social formations in the abstract. (iii) In Althusser and the writings of certain others, the notion of 'relative autonomy' was seen as an invariant across modes of production. In Poulantzas's case, his error lay in trying to apply this formulation to pre-capitalist societies. (iv) *PPSC*'s formalism suggests that the various instances – the political, the ideological, the economic – were somehow hermetically sealed one from another. For example, he was unable to show how precisely the state intervened in the economy, a problem he tried to solve in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (CCC). And one way to address the issue is to understand classes not

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., page 74.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ His phrase on page 74.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., page 76.

⁵⁷² See 'On the Question of Formalism', page 77.

merely in their economic sense, but in the political and ideological dimensions as well. (v) A last word on structuralism. In *PPSC*, he claims he makes a clear distinction between structures and practices, a distinction I do not discern.⁵⁷³ In any event, other critics have seen this distinction and found fault with it. In the Poulantzian view, this distinction precisely addresses the issue of structuralism, in that, by assuming all practices into class practices, he introduces a form of voluntarism that provides an escape hatch from the curse of structuralism. It is class struggle through which classes exist and through which the state is formed. It is to the detriment of most modern sociology, he argues, that it seems to want to avoid any discussion of class struggle at all.⁵⁷⁴ Instead, in *CCC*, Poulantzas claims, he rectifies this structuralism by examining class struggle first and foremost, by showing, for example, the nature of class practice in many forms.

In a 1978 publication, Poulantzas made a further attempt to set the record straight on the state, social classes and class struggle. This is a profoundly political and strategic article, focused particularly on the ‘what should be done’ question.⁵⁷⁵ He starts with the assertion that, east or west, the experience in the states of modern Europe suggest the only way forward for the working class is going to be statist to the exclusion of mass movements.⁵⁷⁶ The thinking of the Third International was always dominated by instrumentalism as the mechanism that controls bourgeois society, and by an open contempt for direct democracy.⁵⁷⁷ The state is now viewed as a monolith, in which no cracks or fissures appear. Thus the struggles of the popular masses cannot penetrate this monolith, and the strategy must therefore be discarded. The advice that is now meted out to the international leftist brethren is thus (1) to produce a frontal assault on the state and encircle to establish a dual system of power (2) To propose there is no clear pathway to socialism. (3) To argue for the need to seize state power as a means to occupy the higher reaches of the state (4) To suggest that after the fortress has been captured, then the second power (the soviets) can take charge.⁵⁷⁸ Stalinism was thus born from the idea of the second state – the soviets. In the Poulantzian view, this is very little different from social democracy – using the state as a technical instrument with an ‘intrinsic rationality’.⁵⁷⁹ The major question that results from all this is how to maintain the foundations of freedom through the agency of the state, and how do direct democracy and self-management play a part in this process? This is the dilemma facing the democratic socialist movement, and it faces all European countries east and west.

For the moment, the state seems more and more permeated by class struggles.⁵⁸⁰ But to gain power one does not need to follow the ‘dual power’ strategy :

⁵⁷³ Class practices, yes, but not practice on its own.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., page 82.

⁵⁷⁵ Poulantzas, 1978, op. cit.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., page 75. In a review of Lenin and Luxembourg, he reminds us what is at stake. From Lenin, we remember that he argued that the state must be overthrown, and replaced by the soviets, which are not a state at all, but the first stage in the ‘withering of the state’. This proposal was quickly replaced by statism, about which Luxembourg, the ‘eagle of revolution’, had much to say. Luxembourg complained of the lack of direct democracy, a free press and free assembly as the soviets began to take power.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., page 78.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., page 78.

⁵⁷⁹ His term, page 79. To assert the essential similarity between Stalinism and social democracy seems entirely overdrawn.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., page 80.

The State is neither a thing-instrument that may be taken away, nor a fortress that may be penetrated by means of a wooden horse, nor yet a safe that may be cracked by burglary: it is the heart of the exercise of political power.⁵⁸¹

Any change, any revolution that might erupt, therefore, must take place *within* that state and not outside it. Is this simply reformism? It does not have to be so if power comes to reside with the popular masses. The state must therefore be seen as a battleground.⁵⁸² In this battle, the state must change its nature entirely, and this may not be the same as the ‘smashing of the state’, but rather may need elements of representative democracy if it is to be successful.

The popular masses must be included in such a transformation, and a range of self-management centres may well be established. Both a transformation of the state and the process of self-management are required for the change to occur, and to avoid the problem of statism. The question then becomes – how could the two elements of the transformation be aligned? This all very much depends on the active engagement of the popular masses, and would involve the support of a left government for the changes occurring outside the state. But at present :

History has not yet given us a successful experience of the democratic road to socialism ... It can naturally be argued ... that if democratic socialism has never yet existed, this is because it is impossible. Maybe ... But one thing is certain: socialism will be democratic or it will not be at all.⁵⁸³

The consequences of Poulantzas’s state theory in political strategy are clear here. If the state is where class struggle resides, at least in part, it is also here that any socialist takeover must also occur. Coupled with extra-state activities, echoing earlier Luxembourgian arguments, the way forward rests on advanced social democracies forming, and gaining, popular support.

There is a last stanza to add to this section of the discussion. Just six months before his suicide, Poulantzas gave an interview to *Marxism Today*.⁵⁸⁴ Much of the discussion is political-strategic, but there is also an important theoretical exchange in which Poulantzas sets out his final thinking on the nature of the state, and this material should not be overlooked. He comments that among certain Marxists :

The state is seen as a kind of closed place which can be taken only by an external type of strategy, whether it be the Leninist frontal type of strategy or the Gramscian type of encircling of the state. In its place I began to think of the state as a condensation, a relation of forces ...⁵⁸⁵

The discussion focuses on a ‘problem with Leninism’, which refers specifically to his theory of the state and direct democracy. Lenin insisted on the soviets as the only organ of worker representation – Luxembourg argued instead for a wider base for democratic movements. The focus on the rank and file, and on direct democracy Poulantzas finds valuable, but the arguments in ‘*What is to be Done*’ are discarded, as is the strategy to smash the organs of representative democracy, since this latter move leads to the formation of a state party, centralism and statism.⁵⁸⁶ Poulantzas also argues very powerfully for the theory of relative autonomy. If the fundamental question is whether one is

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., page 81.

⁵⁸² Ibid., page 82.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., page 87.

⁵⁸⁴ *Marxism Today*, July 1979, with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt, ‘Interview with Nicos Poulantzas’.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., page 198.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., pages 197-198.

Marxist or not, then the theoretical litmus test rests on acceptance of the theory of relative autonomy.⁵⁸⁷ He appears exhausted and angry. He ask himself whether or not he is right to be a Marxist, not a question he could have asked during much of his life, one would have imagined. But if one sticks to this strategy, he feels little more can be said on the subject. Discussion then turns to Poulantzas's new book *State, Power, Socialism*⁵⁸⁸, which we will discuss fully below, but here we are given a taste of the argument to come. The interviewers comment that Poulantzas seems to be arguing that social democracies are taking an authoritarian turn, which he terms 'authoritarian statism'. Poulantzas is seeking to understand a newly-emerging form of the state. By this he does not mean that fascism is on the horizon, but merely that the present capitalist state is becoming less democratic. He further underlines the argument that this emerging state may take on a market-liberal quality in some societies, and a more repressive character elsewhere. Lenin took the view that the capitalist state had two stages – the state of industrial capitalism, and the state of monopoly capitalism. The question is whether there is a third kind of state now in operation. The discussion concludes with the discussion of social movements – the feminist movement, the ecology movement – and how these social movements and the traditional party of the working class might work together. These questions of political strategy for the future remain unanswered.

Brilliant Formulations : Relative Autonomy, Unity and the Power Bloc.

What, then, does Poulantzas add to Marxist theories of the state? We might underline the following significant points :

1. How well does he meet the challenge of developing a theory of the state by *Completing the Theoretical Work* of the past? In his early sections of *Political Power and Social Classes*, he is at pains to set out this theoretical project⁵⁸⁹ as the correcting, refashioning and reformulation of existing theories of the state. Though the tone is frequently schoolmasterly and chiding, and while he does routinely take on the role of the scold, in correcting, for example, Marx, for being contaminated with his own earlier writing during his later mature phase, he does carry this task out quite thoroughly. Many plans go by the wayside, many numbering systems are incomplete, but the task of theoretical construction and reconstruction does go on relentlessly. It takes some intellectual confidence for a young academic worker to decide to show Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci the error of their ways, but this is the task he takes on, and he is largely successful.

⁵⁸⁷ Poulantzas makes these comments with some feeling. He says 'I think that the most that one can do for the specificity of politics is what I have done. I am sorry to have to speak like that.

I am not absolutely sure myself that I am right to be Marxist; one is never sure. But if one is Marxist, the determinant role of relations of production, in the very complex sense, must mean something; and if it does, one can only speak of "relative autonomy" - this is the only solution.' Op cit., page 198.

⁵⁸⁸ *State, Power, Socialism*, Verso, London, 1980, but published in France earlier as *L'Etat, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1978.

⁵⁸⁹ Another problem is embedded here, but we have, perhaps, had enough of problems, so we can perhaps mention it in only in passing. In his 1976 article, he also admits to a certain *theoreticism*, that is, to the charge that what he is doing is starting with existing theory, reworking this theory using Marxist scientific methodology, and creating new concepts, new knowledge, without the benefit of connection to the 'real' or the historical world at all. It is a claim that is well founded, but not completely accurate. It is a powerful quality in *PPSC*, though this is a less plausible charge in relation to the works on fascism. We catch him here, in *PPSC*, in a theoreticist moment, rapidly rectified in later work.

2. *The Theory of the State* – what are its key elements? One must underline some fundamental dimensions :

(i) The notion of *relative autonomy* is the centrepiece of the work, and he develops its power in a variety of directions. *First*, he wants to remind us that this term is hardly new, and that it is embedded, even if often implicitly, in the work of Marx and Lenin. Readers have often assumed the concept develops *de novo* from Poulantzas, but nothing could be further from the truth. Poulantzas takes this concept to be fundamental to the Marxist tradition as a whole. His work, then, is to clarify and to reveal what is hidden in the classic texts. *Second*, the term is usefully employed, he claims, to understand *all* forms of the capitalist state, whether it be fascist-authoritarian or bourgeois-democratic. Thus the notion that relative autonomy only refers to the social democratic form is mistaken. The breadth of this analysis is clearly underlined in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, where he deftly uses the same theoretical apparatus as he does in the analysis of social democracies. *Third*, in his hands, this is an immensely sophisticated and powerful concept that drives our understanding of the capitalist state forward quite markedly in a number of ways. By separating out the connection between the political and the economic, by distinguishing his argument so forcefully from instrumentalism, he is able to explain a vast territory of history, though the power of his argument is not often made clear. But fundamentally, the rise of the welfare state cannot be explained without the use of the theory of relative autonomy, nor can the rise of the new form of the Portuguese state after the dictatorship period, or any number of other historical situations. By showing that these two elements, the economic and the political, do not move lockstep together, we are able to understand the apparent ambiguities of state functioning, as well as the flexibility and durability that the capitalist state establishes for the capitalist social formation in general. He is able to show nothing less than how the state ensured capitalist survival during the crisis of the Great Depression of the 1930s, for example, when the crisis Marx had long predicted broke out on a global scale. But more than this, he is also keen to extend the very limited role previously allowed for the ideological state apparatuses, going as far as to suggest that this apparatus, at least in its functioning, stretches well beyond the borders of the formal state structures. The claim that the three elements of capitalism – the economic, the political and the ideological – form complex relations between each other depending on specific historical conditions, allows for great analytical complexity in understanding concrete situations, and it thus immensely powerful. Indeed, its power is not limited to capitalism itself, but is also usefully applied by him to feudalism, and, most importantly, to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. *Fourth*, he never lets a focus on class struggle fade from view. Thus he sees the state, first as a *condensation of classes*, and then as a *social relation*, in which classes struggle and compete. He does use a structuralist argument quite explicitly in *Political Power and Social Classes*, but his discussion of practice is actually routinely focused on class struggle. He is entirely uninterested in the ‘bourgeois problematic’ of the individual,⁵⁹⁰ but to suggest his argument is bereft of agency is patently absurd. It is simply that he refuses to reduce agency to individual action, insisting at all times that the crucial form of agency to understand is class agency through class struggle. Late in *Political Power and Social Classes*, he attempts a definition. ‘Relative Autonomy’ refers to :

... the state’s relation to the field of the class struggle, in particular its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the classes and fractions of the power bloc, and by extension vis-à-vis its allies and supporters.⁵⁹¹

And relative autonomy may take on several forms :

⁵⁹⁰ He often calls this the humanist deviation, and excoriates a number of theorists with this label, including Lukàcs and Marcuse.

⁵⁹¹ *PPSC*, page 255.

The state, may, for example, present itself as the political guarantor of the interests of various classes and fractions of the power bloc against the interests of the hegemonic class or fraction, and it may sometimes play off those classes and fractions against the latter. But it does this in its function of political organizer of the hegemonic class or fraction and forces it to admit the sacrifices necessary for its hegemony. To say, therefore, as in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the state is the managing committee for the common affairs of the bourgeoisie in its ensemble is both correct and insufficient: it is insufficient if it makes us lose sight of the state's complex role vis-à-vis the power bloc, and its particular relation to the hegemonic class or fraction.⁵⁹²

Fifth, Poulantzas reminds us of history, and the shifting alliances and social forces at work at each moment. In any given society, the remnants of the old modes of production are present, along with their concomitant social classes and class fractions – the peasantry from feudalism is the obvious example. As time passes, various class fractions disappear from view, and others emerge. Thus the state's role is to manage these elements, but always in an unsettled environment. The state never presides over an equilibrium, because capitalism is systematically restless, founded as it is on contradictions, exploitation and domination.

From this fundamental understanding follows a further series of theoretical achievements.

(ii) The notion of the *power bloc*, which he draws from Gramsci, allows us to understand more fully how it is that the state must seek to organize the various elements of the ruling class when they are unable to do this themselves. In addition, he is able to show how the state works towards the disunity of the popular masses. By the 'power bloc' he means the structure of relationships between the dominant class fractions of society. While the state must often manage these competing elements so that they may 'rule' politically as well as dominate the economic sphere, it must also simultaneously hide the class nature of the social world from the dominant classes. According to Marx, it is the rise of universal suffrage that makes it necessary for the state to act in this way. Thus the power bloc maintains a complex contradiction in unity. The maintenance of the power bloc is a fundamental element of state functioning.

(iii) Further, just as he underlines the importance of the 'isolation effect', the formation of 'individual, free citizens' under the rise of bourgeois hegemony, he is also able to show how the state routinely ties itself to the national project of *unity*, providing an overlay of legitimacy in which each individual citizen is afforded a battery of rights and defences against injustice. The state thus both 'isolates' in that it constructs free, separate and individual citizens with no attachment one to another except in an abstract sense, and simultaneously establishes national unity. Thus the state becomes the embodiment of the national will, even as it manages the class conflicts inherent in the social system. In this argument, he is not willing to suggest that the state is somehow broken up into bits and pieces, each one of which is controlled by some element of the class structure, nor is he willing to see the state as an agent of equilibrium. Instead, the task of the 'uniting state' is to pay close attention to the ongoing struggles of social classes at each level of the bureaucratic structure – economic, political and ideological.

(iv) Implicit in his theory of the state, therefore, is a new formulation of *social classes*, a theory that he sets out unambiguously in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. Classes are now conceived through the three dimensions of economy, polity and ideology, replacing the notion widely accepted

⁵⁹² *PPSC*, 301-302.

until this time that classes are fundamentally economic phenomena upon which some superstructural elements may be fitted. For Poulantzas, this simply will not do. By failing to pay attention in the fullest sense to the political and ideological dimensions of class, we have failed to understand the nature of the state itself, and thus we are unable to understand the relation of classes to the state, and the mechanisms by which the state acts.

His theory thus provides a highly original account of the workings of the capitalist state. By underlining the notion of relative autonomy as his central theme, he is able to escape the crude instrumentalism of the past, and gain the theoretical power necessary to explain the emergence of welfarism and the various contradictions inherent in the capitalist formation. By separating out the realms of the economic, political and ideological more clearly, he provides a much more sophisticated account of state activity than had previously been available. Through these accounts of the power bloc and unity, he shows the deeply complex games that the state must play in order to hold a contradictory society together. And, finally, because class struggle is now extended deep into the heart of the state, he is able to show the uncertain nature of capitalist politics and state structure. And almost as an after-thought, he rebuilds Marxist class theory, extending it much more fully into the realms of the political and the ideological.

3. We must end this summary with *Criticisms*.

(i) In his 1976 article, he admits to a series of errors that he admits make life difficult for the reader and for himself, and for the impact of his writing on political theory. First, in attempting to carve out a new theoretical terrain, to correct the errors of previous thinking, and in adding new ideas, he can be said to be guilty of a *formalism* which is off-putting, obscure and confusing. Certainly, anyone who has faithfully worked their way through these materials would agree. Poulantzas wants to argue that this difficulty arose because he was not distinguishing clearly between the 'order of exposition' and the 'order of research'. His preoccupation with Althusserian epistemology, with attempting to correct and to chide others for their lack of rigour, is an over-riding theme. This problem of exposition leads to the dramatically obscure nature of the texts.

Closely associated with this problem is the issue of *abstractionism*. This refers to Poulantzas's palpable failure to deal with the 'world of facts.' At one level this approach is entirely plausible, given the theory-laden nature of the factual world. But at another level, the approach is disingenuous. And it is particularly surprising, given the close relationship that he maintains with Marx throughout his work, that he does not, having set out his epistemological and methodological stall, delve more deeply into history. As I argue above, Marx brilliantly depicts the lives of actual people, all the while being able to develop sophisticated theories of the everyday, as well as of the broader social forces at work. None of this richness is evident in Poulantzas's exposition. He does have empirical referents, it is true. He continually refers to Bonapartism and Bismarck, but as with his theoretical influences, these examples sometimes appear to be a million miles from the present condition of the capitalist state which he plans to theorise.

There is a rare exception to this widespread error. In the section on the bourgeois revolutions in *Political Power and Social Classes* in which Poulantzas examines the cases of Germany, Britain and France,⁵⁹³ he writes in a brilliantly evocative fashion, blending bold theoretical arguments with dense historical evidence. The result is stunning and compelling, and he maintains this momentum for a

⁵⁹³ Chapter Four, pages 168-184, 'The Models of the Bourgeois Revolution.'

long chapter of sixteen pages. But it is a rare example, and, for the most part, even his most ardent admirer is forced to admit that his use of the empirical is gestural at best, certainly cursory in many instances, and focused almost exclusively on the twin case studies of Bonapartism and Bismarck.

Indeed, there is an altogether anachronistic feel about all the work in *Political Power and Social Classes*. It is not merely that the historical referents are from the 19th. Century, but that most of the theoretical debates concern Marx and Lenin, hardly contemporaries of the writer. It is true that functional theory is referred to briefly, and equally quickly dismissed, and other more recent theorists are also mentioned, but the constant theoretical and political references, not just to Marx, but further back to Hegel, and then, 'rushing forward', to Lenin and to Gramsci, give the reader the feeling that this is a debate with the dead. To be fair to Poulantzas, if one takes his whole body of work together, this claim does not hold water. While *Fascism and Dictatorship* remains embedded in the past, as it necessarily must be, nothing could be more contemporary than *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, in which he is writing surrounded by a constantly changing history, and *State, Power and Socialism*, where he debates vigorously with Foucault and the changing contemporary political conditions in Europe and elsewhere. But the lasting memory from the first book remains one in which Marx is sitting side by side with Poulantzas as he puts his arguments together, and he stays in this armchair until the last sentence is complete.

(ii) There are several *lesser problems* which may be dealt with quite quickly. The first minor issue is *clarity*. He tries very hard to clarify and complete existing texts, and indeed his entire argument about the state rests on the well-based assumption that there exists a theoretical lacuna in relation to state functioning. In order to 'close the gap' he is at pains to set out a new argument at length, often using a numbering system, but rarely following through with it, and writing in an extraordinarily dense and ambiguous way that does not aid clarity, but merely adds to the confusion. If his aim was for large numbers of people to read and understand this writing, he has failed entirely. It is only the deeply committed who will work through this argument, looking for the precious theoretical metals hopefully residing in mountains of obscurity. A second smaller issue is *duplication*. I cannot count the number of times he refers back, as if to some unchanging historical certainties, to the cases of Bonaparte and Bismarck, as if all argument can be resolved here, or to Marx, and his consistent arguments about the relations of production. His major theoretical points, the notion of relative autonomy, the power bloc, unity and hegemony, are rehearsed, dissected, repeated and replicated until he has dismembered every word and every phrase into the smallest dimensions of language, as if repetition will finally allow us to understand him, but the text often has the opposite effect. In part, this is because he is working through these problems on the page, but again this stylistic strategy often prevents the reader from gaining access to his meaning.

One might argue that there are plenty of arguments about that are plain, simple and wrong, and that complex social conditions require complex theory. This method of duplication arises because he sees complications everywhere, and thus aims to try to answer the problems embedded in these complications. But the complications are endless, the questions without number, and therefore the answers are, by logical necessity, incomplete.

5. Reinventing Class : *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*.

Having fashioned, perhaps for the first time, an exhaustively developed Marxist theory of the capitalist state, in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*,⁵⁹⁴ Poulantzas now takes on an equally impressive challenge, that of the reformulation of the traditional concepts of social class to be found in the Marxist classics.⁵⁹⁵ Poulantzas was, at this time (1974), greatly influenced by the rise of the World System theorists, and spends much of his first chapter of the new book examining the global capitalist situation.⁵⁹⁶ Here I concentrate mostly on what he has to say that is new about the nation state.

In the foreword, Poulantzas sets out his agenda. He comments, quite strikingly, that he will have little to say about the working class, but will instead be concentrating on the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. For a Marxist scholar, this is indeed surprising, but his argument is that far too little attention has been paid to these two classes, and especially the petty bourgeoisie. Thus instead of the working class, the book concentrates on the enemies of the working class, and their potential allies.⁵⁹⁷ He is rather tentative in setting out this agenda, his prose contrasting sharply with the boldness of his assertions presented in the earlier *Political Power and Social Classes*. He comments :

Given both the contemporary nature and the complexity of the problems I am dealing with, as well as the reasons for the unsystematic and partial character of the work, the arguments presented here are, in the end, but propositions put forward for discussion and rectification. There is nothing definitive about them, among other things because this is not a finished text, but one which presents arguments for criticism.⁵⁹⁸

The tone of this cautionary note is somewhat surprising. It may be the result of some personal circumstance, or the result of some dramatic criticism of earlier work, or a loss of political faith in the direction of his writing. Whatever the reason, the dramatic success of *Political Power and Social Classes*, which had propelled to the front rank of political theorists of his time, would surely have sustained his confidence. In any event, he begins his new theoretical journey with caution.⁵⁹⁹

But then the tone shifts dramatically. What are social classes in Marxist theory, he asks immediately.⁶⁰⁰ They are 'groupings of social agents defined by their place in the ensemble of social practice, and in 'the social division of labour as a whole'. They have economic, political and ideological dimensions. This place in the ensemble of social practices is determined by the structure, and particularly the relations of production. And classes only exist in class struggle. Having hinted that what is to come is tentative and uncertain, he now instantly takes a very bold step by reshaping the theoretical ground of Marxist class analysis in a dramatic and uncompromising way. While this is a novel way of accounting for social class, it is also no surprise to previous readers of *Political Power and Social Classes*, because much of the argument about the definition of classes has already been set out in those earlier pages. After his first foray into class analysis, he turns to 'Internationalism and

⁵⁹⁴ *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. (CCC) NLB, 1975, originally published in France in 1974 by Seuil.

⁵⁹⁵ I focus in what follows largely on his further development of state theory, rather than on his expositions on class.

⁵⁹⁶ CCC, pages 42-69.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., page 10.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., page 11.

⁵⁹⁹ He also tells us on page 11, that much of the theoretical work presented here has already appeared in *PPSC*, and in *FD*, op. cit.

⁶⁰⁰ Op. cit., pages 14-15.

the Nation State'.⁶⁰¹ Here he raises the question of whether recent trends in the world system of nation states have meant that the very idea of the nation state itself is under attack (Baran and Sweezy, Magdoff, Nicolaus).⁶⁰² Has the American super-state simply taken over political power from other states, rendering them helpless? For others writing about the world system, nothing has changed.⁶⁰³ In the pages that follow Poulantzas tries to examine the indices of American capitalist penetration in other countries, and he examines the internationalization of the labour process. What do these processes mean for the nation-state? In 'Internationalization and the Nation State', he addresses this problem directly.⁶⁰⁴

The issue first raised is the question of the various national bourgeoisies – can American capitalism be resisted, and how does American imperialism affect domestic class structures and the nation state? The national bourgeoisie must now be defined in economic, political and ideological terms. In seeking to examine this question, one must face the empirical fact that there is a good deal of domestic interpenetration of capital in a variety of countries, including the United States, so that it is hard to compare local markets with overseas markets, local ownership with overseas ownership, local capital with overseas capital. It is more useful to think of the domestic bourgeoisie as occupying a specific role in the nation state as the dominant fraction of the domestic power bloc, thus making it 'part of the people', and therefore able to make some alliance with the popular masses.⁶⁰⁵ In contrast, overseas capital, here termed the 'comprador bourgeoisie' a term used by Samir Amin, are those members of the indigenous middle class who work for overseas enterprises, and act as intermediaries for foreign interests. In the Poulantzian view, none of the changes in the world system mean that the nation state is by-passed. But there are changes to the political and institutional systems of nations as a result of overseas capital penetration. The nation-state must now intervene as the manager of national hegemony into a field which is penetrated by international capital. External nations, however, do not directly involve themselves in the management of domestic power blocs. But they are represented in these alliances by members of the domestic bourgeoisie who speak for them. And we must remember that the state is not a mere tool or instrument of the capitalist class.⁶⁰⁶ Instead, as he has often argued before, the state is the agent of national unity, an institution established to create cohesion of a society divided into classes. And changes are also occurring among the working class, who are also grappling with the internationalization of the labour process. As well, the petty bourgeoisie are also reproducing themselves in new forms. Thus, dramatic changes are taking place in all aspects of the class structure. But in spite of all these changes, the national state persists.

What seems to be happening is not the emergence of a super-state that is taking a hegemonic role in managing other states, but rather the new processes lead to 'ruptures of the national unity'⁶⁰⁷ within existing states. Thus, there is a resurgence in regionalism - Brittany, the Basque Country, Scotland etc., – and a resistance to the national project. Poulantzas wants to claim that international capital is

⁶⁰¹ CCC, pages 38ff.

⁶⁰² Here he is referring to Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, Harmondsworth, 1966; Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, New York, 1969 ; Martin Nicolaus, 'U.S.A.: The Universal Contradiction', in *New Left Review* 68, 1971.

⁶⁰³ Here he includes Ernest Mandel, *Europe vs. America*, NLB, 1970 ; Michael Kidron *Western Capitalism since the War*, Harmondsworth, 1968 ; Bill Warren, 'How International is Capital?' in *New Left Review* 68, 1971.

⁶⁰⁴ CCC, pages 70ff.

⁶⁰⁵ CCC, page 71. This is language familiar to readers of *Crisis of the Dictatorships*, in which Poulantzas is thinking particularly of the Portuguese case.

⁶⁰⁶ CCC, page 78.

⁶⁰⁷ His phrase, page 80.

at the heart of this movement, though this seems unlikely. Indeed, many of these movements are, in part, forms of resistance to the encroachment of global trends. In any event, these trends certainly undermine the national project.

Do international companies, 'multi-national giants', have the power to displace states? According to Poulantzas, to see the problem this way is to mis-specify the question. States have no power outside the class struggle, but they do have the power to intervene. And with the development of the monopoly capital stage, the state has gained considerably more capacity to influence proceedings.⁶⁰⁸ This results from the growth of economic functions resulting from the new capital formations. These new functions express new modes of class domination, and they are connected with political and economic initiatives as well. This is not a neutral-technical process, but rather the shifting of the shape of class domination. The national state, in this new environment, must reproduce positions in the class structure, as well as train subjects to take their places in this structure.⁶⁰⁹ Now, however, this process takes place within an international division of labour, and in the context of the international formation of capital. This does not mean, as some have proposed, that the United States is the model for the future, as Marx did with Britain in the 19th. Century. Each country deserves its own analysis. Whether the so-called 'strong states' that are presently being formed in Europe will lead to fascism remains unclear.

This argument leads to several early conclusions. *First*, this (1974) is certainly a period of American hegemony, established after World War Two and progressing since then. But is also true that American hegemony is declining :

The smarting defeat of the United States in Vietnam, and the upsurge of national liberation struggles in the dominated formations in general, have contributed significantly to the present decline in certain forms of American hegemony.⁶¹⁰

Second, we must be cautious not to overstate the nature of this decline. It does mean the end of American domination. What seems to be in crisis is the global world system, with the rise of global class struggle, and especially the struggle between American capital and capital from other sources. There is thus a struggle in the nature of global hegemony, and this may only be finally be resolved by the actions of the popular masses, and this is particularly important in Europe.

One of the most essential arguments in the book centres on the changing nature of the bourgeoisie and its relationship to the state.⁶¹¹ And in the next section, the author again contradicts his earlier proposals. At the outset of the book, he tells us that he will be ignoring the working class, but now he tells us that the 'dominated classes' must be considered as well.⁶¹² We are reminded that the Marxist classics are not limited to the period of 'competitive capitalism', but rather extend their reach to monopoly capitalism. Indeed, Poulantzas wants to claim that to understand the 'present (1974) situation' of monopoly capitalism, one must return to the classics. And, to begin with, it is a mistake to claim that only monopoly capitalism exists and other forms of capital have disappeared. As before, the state remains the unifier of the power bloc, and this power bloc comprises several distinct elements. Monopoly capital, derived from finance capital, does not comprise a unity, but

⁶⁰⁸ CCC, page 81.

⁶⁰⁹ CCC, page 83.

⁶¹⁰ CCC, page 85.

⁶¹¹ CCC, pages 156ff.

⁶¹² Ibid., page 156.

rather is riven with internal contradictions. As before in other periods of history, the state acts politically on behalf of the dominant faction, and sometimes against its immediate interests, to secure the political domination of the category. Again, we must be reminded that the state is not a simple tool that can be manipulated by a particular class or class fraction. The state therefore still acts in a relatively autonomous way. Thus this is not a fusion of the state with the monopoly class, nor is the state playing the role of arbiter :

The state does not have its own 'power', but it forms the contradictory locus of condensation for the balance of forces that divides even the dominant class itself, and particularly its hegemonic fraction – monopoly capital.⁶¹³

The argument is straightforward enough here – in the phase of monopoly capital that he appears to suggest, of course with little in the way of empirical referents, is now dominating Europe, nothing much has changed. The state has not suddenly become the simple instrument of capital, or any fraction of capital. It retains its role as a relatively autonomous entity, and it acts, as always, as the guarantor of social unity, and as the foundation of the power bloc. The purpose of this section of writing is thus to reinforce the view, therefore, that the present stage of monopoly capitalism has not outrun the usefulness or the applicability of his theory of the state. Moreover, he wants to claim that the classic Marxist texts had this phenomenon covered – they had already theorised the relation between monopoly capitalism and the state. There is much repetition and rehearsal of this argument that extends over several pages, but this is the gist of the claim.⁶¹⁴ The state, he reminds us (again), must be considered as a relation, not a thing, or a subject.⁶¹⁵

Nonetheless, even if these axioms still hold true, something has still changed, and this is especially so with regard to the forms of economic interventions by the state that are now taking place. These changes relate to the expanded nature of imperial capitalism, the closing of 'of the gap between economic ownership and possession',⁶¹⁶ which leads to centralization and restructuring, because of the 'dissolution effect' that monopoly capital has on other forms of capital, the elimination of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, and the expansion of monopoly capital into agriculture, and because of the further exploitation of labour and other changes.

The changes are not limited to the economic sphere. A new relationship is developing between the political, economic and ideological spheres, with the play between monopoly capitalism and the state now occurring within more narrow limits than before. But this does not mean that 'late capitalism' has somehow devised a rational plan that overcomes class conflict. This is an error that Keynes, Galbraith and others have fallen into.⁶¹⁷ Indeed, such an idea is mythical. The state remains as the agent of cohesion in the face of contradictory forces. Others see the state 'drained of power', again a misguided view.

To stay with the established argument allows us to explain a variety of contemporary phenomena, including the current crisis of hegemony in Europe. Thus while the state is still not an instrument, it

⁶¹³ CCC, pages 158-159.

⁶¹⁴ He repeats this claim over many pages, and especially pages 160-164, where he refutes other theoretical positions as 'fusionist' or as 'instrumentalist'.

⁶¹⁵ This comment is made in footnote 7, page 161, op. cit. The notion of the state as a subject, which sometimes is implied in his writing, is here discarded if by this term is meant an entity with its own will and volition.

⁶¹⁶ His phrase, page 166.

⁶¹⁷ CCC, 169.

is certainly more limited in its role than before. The state is not able to take long-term measures that would ensure stability, but is instead only able to make temporary shifts in policy to deal with immediate crises. The economic crises have been transformed into political and ideological crises :

The state has thus been transformed from a buffer or safety valve on economic crises into a sounding-box for the reproduction crises of social relations.⁶¹⁸

Every economic crisis now becomes a crisis of the state. Thus the unity in which the state has been routinely engaged is now under threat. Poulantzas is now admitting, contrary to his earlier protestations, that the state is now much more instrumental and can no longer hold the middle ground to secure the national project under its umbrella.⁶¹⁹ The state seems unable to secure long-term hegemony over the bourgeois crisis. Thus, changes in the structure of legitimacy are now taking place, in which there is a move afoot from the legitimacy of popular sovereignty to the legitimacy of parliament. This involves a breakdown between the realms of the public and the private, a loss in parliamentary democracy, and a gain by private interests over the state.

Poulantzas now turns to the question of the state managers.⁶²⁰ Poulantzas wants to take issue with modern theorists who are keen to separate those who own from those who manage – clearly state managers are in the latter category. This writing, he argues, is fundamentally an attack on class theory. In this view, the managerial mind is not driven by profit, but by efficiency, and this category is often referred to as a new dominant class. This line of thinking is found in Galbraith's work, in the writing of Ralph Dahrendorf, who sees classes as stemming from power relations, from Touraine, who argues that knowledge is the source of class differences, and from C. Wright Mills, who promotes the importance of elites. Such arguments are confused for several reasons (i) Real ownership still resides with capital (ii) If managers hold shares in an enterprise, then they become capitalists (iii) It is a mistake to treat a collection of individual agents as a social class because this suggests that class finally resides in the motivations of individual agents. Behavioural motivation is not at the core of class location, but rather the objective position of agents in the class structure. The managers, therefore, might best be placed as a fraction of the dominant class.⁶²¹ Does this argument stand up to careful analysis?

Marx had already proposed that there are functions of direction and ownership within capital, and that these functions may be quite distinct from ownership, and may refer to different categories of people. Supervision and ownership may be separate. But it seems clear that both these functions are part of the process of bourgeois ownership, and that those who carry out these activities are thus members of the owning class. These locations appear to be clearly defined on the basis of the social division of labour :

It is not confined to the relations of production, but extends to ideological and political relations that these relations of production entail, which are thus also a constitutive factor of structural class relations.⁶²²

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., page 172.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ CCC, pages 175-189.

⁶²¹ Ibid., page 179.

⁶²² CCC, page 180.

This suggests that managers are located in the dominant class because of their structural location in that class, but that they cannot constitute a separate fraction of the class separate from the owners. This is because what they do is in no way separate from the functioning of owners. In addition, managers do a variety of things in various sectors of the economy, and thus have no unity, and cannot comprise a single class fraction. This is because they belong to finance capital, or industrial capital or commercial capital, and are thus divided.

Now we move from a consideration of managers in capitalist undertakings, and examine the heads of the state apparatus themselves.⁶²³ Galbraith and some in the PCF⁶²⁴ have argued that the higher echelons of the state and leaders of the monopoly capital fractions enjoy the same social origin, belong to the same social clubs, and thus share a common world view. The state has thus become welded to the capitalist class – they have become as one. But the truth is that these two categories have often been separate, and have clear and distinct interests. The same mistake was made about fascism as the dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie because members of this class filled the ranks of the state, but fascism was always a bourgeois state. And in the contemporary situation, the same situation can arise, when the membership of the high offices of the state are not derived simply from the ruling class, but from the petty bourgeoisie and elsewhere. This situation provides a perfect shield against those who would argue that one class runs everything. But this does not mean that members of the ruling class do not participate or manage the state. This has always been the case. But this remains a secondary matter. It has been true of the French case in the 1950's and 1960's, and it is largely associated with the phenomenon of Gaullism. But the civil service and the Grand Écoles⁶²⁵ also provide agents from other classes, even if many of these people are from the higher orders. This suggests that a technocratic elite is being trained for higher office, and for the higher reaches of state management.

The idea that a common social background between the dominant class and the state managers is the crucial point at issue is to miss the key question at stake. We must ask what the state managers do – what is their function? State functionaries carry out specific tasks on behalf of the state, which cannot be reduced to class origin or social background. They form a social category, who, whether distinct by social background, or with a social background in common, must exhibit an internal unity of purpose, such that the state functions in an organized fashion. Marx used the English example of the feudal bureaucracy running the state on behalf of the industrial bourgeoisie, and Lenin used the case of the 'bourgeois specialists' running the Soviet state.⁶²⁶ This social category can sometime act as a potent social force, and it may intervene in the class struggle on its own. But it cannot simply be seen as the agent of the ruling fraction of the bourgeoisie.

Thus this social category of agents assumes a specific function in conditions of relative autonomy. A social category exists within the class structure – it does not reside outside it. And the members of the state bureaucracy do not throw their class origins aside as soon as they enter the state structure. The class position of bureaucrats is various, the senior positions coming from the bourgeoisie, the lower levels from various class origins. The senior people are bourgeois, not because of their class origins, however, but because of the work they do on behalf of capital.⁶²⁷ But

⁶²³ Ibid., pages 183-189.

⁶²⁴ PCF - Parti Communiste Français, the French Communist Party.

⁶²⁵ Elite institutions outside the traditional state system that provide an avenue into the higher reaches of the social structure.

⁶²⁶ CCC, page 186.

⁶²⁷ CCC, page 187.

the state must still act as the agent of social cohesion and national unity. Thus if the heads of the state apparatus are not a separate fraction of the ruling class, it is because of the functioning of the state in a broader sense than simply maintaining capital. Thus compared to managers in other sectors of society, the state managers have a far wider role. They are charged with reproducing the conditions under which political and ideological domination can continue to the advantage of capitalist undertakings. As a result of these undertakings, the state reflects the social conflicts of the society it represents. The ideology that results, that of protecting the national interest, can still be considered part of bourgeois ideology. Thus, state managers are best understood as a social category that can function in a unitary way to serve the public good. The class origins of these agents is significant but it is not determinant. But class origin can become significant in the conditions of political crisis.

Poulantzas now spends many pages discussing changes in the petty bourgeoisie. He is keen to show that an emerging petty bourgeoisie belong analytically with the traditional petty bourgeoisie, the small-holding farmers and the self-employed shopkeepers. The questions he asks are – is this social class divided into fractions? How are these fractions to be compared to class fractions in the two major classes, and what political positions would members of this class hold?⁶²⁸

The new petty bourgeoisie are non-productive wage-earners, and belong to neither of the major classes. And collectively, the petty bourgeoisie are excluded economically from the two major classes, but have common political and ideological tendencies. And it is the political and ideological elements that are crucial here in defining the petty bourgeoisie in the structuring of classes.⁶²⁹ What is happening in the present stage of monopoly capitalism is that the traditional petty bourgeoisie are fading away, and the new petty bourgeoisie are rising. How this is happening is a matter for careful analysis.

What is the nature of the new petty bourgeoisie? They are clearly not ‘owners’, but rather sit closer to the working class as waged and salaried employees. In making the assessment of class position, Poulantzas points to the political function that the new petty bourgeoisie take in the social relations of production. He examines the case of scientists and technicians at length and comes to the conclusion that they do not belong with the working class because of the dominant political and ideological positions they hold. Sometimes they may hold bourgeois class positions, and sometimes working class positions. And when the political crisis comes, they may side with either party.

Thus the new petty bourgeoisie do not belong to the working class but are themselves exploited by capital themselves. But it is clear that political and ideological elements are central in the present analysis. First, they are characterised by mental labour, rather than manual labour.⁶³⁰ In a detailed examination of this problem, leaning heavily on Gramsci, Poulantzas concludes that while the mental/manual division is valuable, it is not a hard and fast rule, and that this division affects different members of this category in different ways.⁶³¹ This suggests, therefore, that there are class fractions among the petty bourgeoisie, and that, in the present social conditions, there is taking place a great fractioning and division among this class. Thus the new petty bourgeoisie are characterised primarily by mental labour, and they comprise those elements of capitalist personnel to whom the

⁶²⁸ CCC, page 205.

⁶²⁹ CCC, page 207.

⁶³⁰ Op. Cit., pages 251-252.

⁶³¹ Op. cit., page 256.

secret knowledge of the system is given.⁶³² But they are also a group who are subordinate to, and are dominated by, capitalism. And within this class, there are many sub-divisions. The levels of knowledge within the ranks of this strata are varied, and this leads to differentiation and inequality.

The various companies that comprise contemporary capitalism undoubtedly establish bureaucratic apparatuses similar to those of the state, in some ways. These apparatuses embody the same politico-ideological relationships as in the state, but the predominant element here is the economic. They are not defined by their organizational functioning but by their role in the social relations of production. Class relations are the only possible source of authority and domination. Complex corporations are thus not only divided into classes – bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, workers – but also divided horizontally into production units. In addition, the petty bourgeoisie is further divided according to the nature of knowledge and authority provided to that strata.

There is a high level of mobility among the petty bourgeoisie compared to other classes.⁶³³ Many fall into the working class, but the number who move into the owning class is far greater than from the working class. And major changes are occurring within this class. Poulantzas notes (i) the feminization of this class ; (ii) the reduction of the gap in wages between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class, and thus the loss of wage privilege⁶³⁴ ; (iii) the development of the manual/mental division within mental labour ; and (iv) increases in unemployment among mental workers, leading to a reserve army of labour among mental workers. This leads, in times of crisis, to the amalgamation of some elements of the petty bourgeoisie with elements of the working class movement. At the lower end of the petty bourgeoisie, there are obvious alliances to be made, since these workers have little power and little authority – we think here of shop assistants and lower-level clerical workers.

Overall, the traditional petty bourgeoisie have recently declined in France, and the new petty bourgeoisie have increased, a trend which has been seen in several European countries, and which affects independent craftsmen and women, as well as small shopkeepers. The small peasantry have declined even further.

Poulantzas ends his book with some political considerations.⁶³⁵ After spending much of his time examining the rise of the new petty bourgeoisie under late capitalism, he now focuses his attention on the political opportunities provided by this change. He sees little to suggest that this new class will ally any time soon with the working class to bring about the socialist revolution. The significance of this rising class is underlined, however, and Poulantzas argues that its increase in numbers will make it a significant force in reproducing the social relations of class. A socialist revolution might be possible, however. The collapse of the small peasantry, who, in France at least, were always a conservative force opposing revolution, means that they are now largely a spent force in French politics. The French bourgeoisie have always known how to buy their loyalty. But many of these small farmers and their children have been proletarianized by the rise of capitalist agriculture, and have thus become members of the working class, whether they understand this or not. This loss in support for the bourgeoisie is one of the reasons for the present crisis in France. This may lead to new political alliances, though these are by no means certain. If the working class

⁶³² CCC, page 270.

⁶³³ CCC, page 282.

⁶³⁴ CCC, page 305-306.

⁶³⁵ Pages 332-335.

is to progress, it must do so in alliance with other social forces. The question is whether political organizations exist that can bring this change about, and whether the working class has the leadership among its organizations to bring in elements of the new petty bourgeoisie. There is thus considerable uncertainty about whether the petty bourgeoisie and the working class will form an alliance but it is a possibility. But the political possibilities are still uncertain.

Poulantzas, Classes and the State

The great contribution *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* makes to Marxism is to reinvent the fundamental theory of social class which had long needed a thorough renovation. By underscoring and emphasizing, in his relatively autonomous style, the profound significance of the political and the ideological dimensions of class, he opens up a new field of class analysis to other writers, a field that soon became rapidly filled by the work of others. Whether Poulantzas 'did this on his own', whether he established a new continent of empirical and theoretical inquiry, could be hotly debated. It is clear, for example, that Pierre Bourdieu had been hard at work on a parallel project, but in his case from the empirical end of the problem, a project that culminated in the highly acclaimed master work *Distinction*, published in France in 1979,⁶³⁶ and a project that can readily be claimed had little to do with Poulantzas. An international project using similar class criteria, and fundamentally an empirical undertaking, had used Poulantzas's work, and sought to chart out the class structure of various capitalist nations.⁶³⁷ It is perhaps most sensible to say that, with others, he charted a new way forward that suggested the power that class analysis might have in explaining social hierarchies, and that on its own, this was a very significant achievement. He made clear what had lain dormant in the classical Marxist texts, and illuminated to the fullest extent the power of these historical analyses.

Of particular significance in the present case is the question of what this class analysis does for his *theory of the state*, a history which this book insists on tracing. Did the reshaping of class theory, and the changing political and economic conditions, shift his understandings of state theory to any extent. We might say, as a general summary, that it extended and enriched this theory in certain important ways. Let me summarise this shift in a systematic fashion :

1. In the present (1974) state of capitalism, Poulantzas argues that the expanding hegemony of American capitalism means that nation states now have to manage a more complex hegemony than before. The penetration of American capital into domestic states, with the rise of the comprador class in these societies, means that the various fractions of the capitalist class are further divided, and thus the management of the hegemonic bloc is made more difficult.
2. This does not mean that the rise of a 'super-state' has taken place that now replaces nation-states, as some have argued, but simply that the domestic state is harder to manage than before. None the less, the nation-state persists.

⁶³⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

⁶³⁷ See Eric Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, Verso, London, 1979.

3. The dominance of monopoly capital under the contemporary conditions means that the state actually intervenes more than in the past in order to assist the monopoly capitalist project. This does not mean that the state and the private sector merge into one – the fusionist argument from Marx that Poulantzas is at pains to refute - but the relationship is certainly a close one. He remains adamant that relative autonomy still exists between the state and the ruling categories, but it is also clear that he admits that the degrees of freedom available to the state are reduced. Nonetheless, his position is that the classical texts had an explanation for monopoly capitalism, and that his theory of relative autonomy is fully able to explain present conditions. But what it means too is that, given the state is heavily involved in economic intervention, every economic crisis is a crisis of the state, and thus a unified hegemony is hard to maintain.

4. Having dealt with the threat of world systems theory and the changing nature of capitalism, he now addresses the issue of the class structure and the state. He spends a good deal of time dismissing arguments that suggest that the bourgeoisie and the state managers belong to the same clubs, come from the same social backgrounds, and are thus part of a single cabal that runs things according to the wishes of a small clique of large owners. The argument he proposes is two-fold. First, it is clear from the historical record that this is often not the case – Bonapartism and Bismarckism, not to mention the late 19th century British state are clear example - so the claim is empirically false. But much more importantly, to focus on the motivation and behaviours of individual agents is to latch onto a false problematic, that is, to misinterpret what the state does, independent of the individual qualities of agents in it. Its national purpose is social unity of a class-divided society. This is the function that it carries out, whoever is in charge.

5. Poulantzas then spends a good deal of time on the rise of the ‘new petty bourgeoisie’. This makes sense given that the book focuses on class. By this class he refers to the waged and salaried members of the private and public bureaucracies. He sees this class largely defined by political and ideological criteria. Those among the industrial concerns will clearly be more closely aligned with economic goals, those in the state with political and ideological purposes. But overall they are brought together by their focus on mental work, as opposed to the menial work forced on the labouring classes. With the loss of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, this new rising class is gaining political significance. Within the state apparatus, there are further divisions among this class according to the level of the location of agents within the hierarchy. At the top, members may come from elite schools, elite families, and from privileged backgrounds, but this is not always so, and is, of course, beside the point. The subaltern ranks may come from a variety of backgrounds. The theme that is constantly rehearsed is that this new class is complex, riven with divisions, and politically uncertain.

6. Finally, Poulantzas ends with some political remarks. Is the new rising petty bourgeoisie an agent for socialist revolution? Ever hopeful, Poulantzas thinks this may be possible, but only if the political institutions for this shift are present, a situation he thinks unlikely. Thus while elaborating on his theory of the state, he is not able to suggest a political path forward.

What he is able to do, perhaps, is to show how this theory of relative autonomy might account for monopoly capitalism, the role of the state in managing the national and global projects that results, and how the agents of the state align to this project. In itself, this seems a significant achievement.

6. Salvaging State Theory : *State, Power, Socialism*.

We are now coming to the end of a long conversation with Nicos Poulantzas on the question of the state, a conversation that started in the 1960s, and ends with his death in 1979. In 1978, he published his last major work, *State, Power, Socialism*,⁶³⁸ a book that represents his final attempt to set out his case on state theory, to respond to his critics, and to deal, as always, with the political conditions of his time, and discuss the way forward.

The book starts with an introduction by Stuart Hall, earlier published in part in *Marxism Today*.⁶³⁹ But in this introduction, Hall provides a fuller assessment of Poulantzas's work than before. It is an entirely appropriate review. Poulantzas had been publishing with New Left Review for most of his intellectual life, starting in 1967 with his critique of British Marxism, and ending in 1978, with a discussion of his last book,⁶⁴⁰ and Hall had been the founding editor, as well as a long-time contributor. A large part of Hall's introduction is focused on the state.⁶⁴¹ In his examination, he points to the profound influence that Althusser had on *Political Power and Social Classes*. He critiques the confusion between structure and practice, and the well-established formalism of the account, which he follows through *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, as well as in *Crisis of the Dictatorships*. But, and in spite of these difficulties, he confirms that both *Political Power and Social Classes* and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* were significant theoretical interventions. He is particularly taken with the theory of the state in *PPSC* – and especially with the separation of the theory of relative autonomy argument from instrumentalism, and from a technico-economic reading of the state.

Poulantzas's writings on the state were early criticised as making the state overly political, a view he first resisted, and then acceded to.⁶⁴² His contribution to class theory, and especially his attempt in delineating the boundary of the working-class, is also confirmed. From the beginning, each of these accounts was steeped in politics, and especially in the consistent speculations Poulantzas made concerning the prospects for the working class and the socialist revolution. Hall reminds us that his later work, and especially *Crisis of the Dictatorships*, is much more conjunctural than the earlier efforts, and much affected by changes in particular societies, especially by changes in Chile, France, Portugal, Spain and Greece. His interview with Henri Weber is especially noted as a point at which his thinking changed.⁶⁴³ Hall is right to argue that the interview is filled with political urgency, but then that urgency was always there, even if frequently hidden behind a barrage of dense language. It

⁶³⁸ *L'État, le Pouvoir, le Socialisme*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1978, Paris. Later published in English with Patrick Camiller as translator. This version is from Verso, London, 2014, *State, Power, Socialism*. (SPS)

⁶³⁹ *Marxism Today*, July 1979, 'Interview with Nicos Poulantzas', with Alan Hunt and Stuart Hall.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Marxist Political Theory in Britain', Nicos Poulantzas, in *New Left Review*, 1/43, May-June 1967, pp. 57-74. 'Towards a Democratic Socialism', Nicos Poulantzas, in *New Left Review*, 1/109, May-June 1978, pp. 75-87.

⁶⁴¹ *State, Power, Socialism*, op. cit. page x.

⁶⁴² See 'The State and the Transition to Socialism, first published in French as 'L'état et la transition au socialisme' in *Critique communiste*, no 16. (June 1977). The English version was taken from *International* volume 1, no. 1 (Autumn, 1977, pages 3-12, and reproduced in *The Poulantzas Reader; Marxism, Law and the State*, edited by James Martin, Verso, London and New York, 2008, pages 334-360. In it, Poulantzas defends the French Left's Common Program, rather than Henri Weber's 'Direct Democracy' which Weber proposes be established in the workplace.

⁶⁴³ This outline comes directly from Hall, page xiii.

is inescapably part of the argument in *Crisis of the Dictatorships*, and the same urgency can be found in all his writing, to a greater or lesser degree.

Then Hall turns to the question of Michel Foucault's writings. In the new book, Hall sees a new mentality developing in Poulantzas's work, an attitude of openness to new ideas, a willingness to escape from the classics and to look forward. This results in the book having a very uncertain and incomplete feeling about it. Poulantzas begins in his introduction by setting out three major themes to be discussed. First he repeats something he first said in *Political Power and Social Classes*, that there can be no general theory of the State within Marxism. He spends time attacking various forms of Marxist dogmatism, and especially Balibar's theoretical attempts. Poulantzas is also at pains to attack 'The New Philosophers', who threatened to take over Foucault. The second section deals with the Gramscian notion that the state is merely force hidden behind the velvet glove of consent. And Poulantzas begins to make use of the Foucauldian vocabulary – discourse ; discipline ; techniques of knowledge – all these now come into play. And in part three, he focuses particularly on Foucault, with his tendency to disperse the power of the state through a series of micro-powers. The main text then covers three issues – the processes of the capitalist state ; the state and political struggles ; and the state and the economy. Each, says Hall, is a novel presentation. The first argues that 'the institutional materiality' of the state is a complex of apparatuses. I cannot concur that this is a new argument, since similar phrases litter *Political Power and Social Classes*, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* and *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*. Again, in the second section, there is nothing new –merely a repetition, as we have seen above, of the notion of the state as a condensation of forces. Finally, in section three, he examines the economic dimension of the state, arguing that the state, in the era of monopoly capitalism, enters directly into the relations of production, But Poulantzas has already made this argument in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, as any careful reading will show.

Hall argues that the most interesting section is the chapter on 'institutional materiality'. Here Poulantzas makes use of Foucault's vocabulary, while at the same time arguing against Foucault's dismissal of the state's power. But Hall finds the work decidedly unfinished. Foucault's terms are everywhere, but the argument is not complete. While Foucault's arguments add to Poulantzas's explanations, the problem lies with the distinct problematic that Foucault is providing, and thus this attempted synthesis seeks to amalgamate two separate theoretical universes. In the end, Poulantzas seems to want to return to a series of all-encompassing truths, while scolding Foucault for the error of his ways. Foucault is, in the end, an anarcho-libertarian, and does not wish to reduce economic relations to class relations or any other single source. His work is profoundly individualist. It is not, Hall wants to claim, merely a 'second-order epistemological discourse', as Poulantzas proposes.⁶⁴⁴ Nor does Poulantzas take advantage of Foucault's insights to develop his own argument further, as he might have done in discussing the role of the organic state intellectuals, or the state and political struggle.

The chapter on the state and the economy is more orthodox, according to Hall. The familiar debates with Balibar, the PCF, the 'logic-of-capital' school and so on, all are there, as in earlier writing, until 'the book picks up steam' when dealing with the capitalist state in crisis. But Hall senses Poulantzas fails to discern how authoritarian statism has been secured by popular consent,

⁶⁴⁴ Hall, xv.

which, by Hall's reckoning, has been managed ideologically, not least by Thatcherism.⁶⁴⁵ Thus, in the Hall view, authoritarian statism needs to be associated with a theory of 'authoritarian populism', an argument we shall follow in the pages to come.⁶⁴⁶ Poulantzas also show the distance he has travelled politically by giving up the dictatorship of the proletariat dogma in favour of the concept of a new dual power, and emphasizing the value of both parliamentary democracy and direct democracy. As the debate with Henri Weber shows, I don't think he has given up the idea of 'dual power', as Hall suggests, but has rather reconfigured it.

Thus, in summary, Hall finds the book 'unsettling' and incomplete :

The book opens up a series of Pandora's boxes. Often, there is a too-swift attempt to secure their lids again, before their untameable genies can escape. This produces a real theoretical unevenness in the book. Yet, this very unevenness also constitutes, by its reverse side, the stimulus of the book is its generative openness.⁶⁴⁷

This section of commentary is perhaps most useful in providing an overview of Poulantzas's work. His early work, sure-footed, encyclopaedic and theoretically rigorous, is contrasted with this latest version – fluid, uncertain, open-ended – and Hall wants to claim, this is fertile territory on which other theorists can work. This book, in contrast to the certainty of his early work, is 'coming apart at the seams', a writer putting his theory at risk. Let us leave the last word with Hall for the moment :

This is Poulantzas adventuring ... The example it leaves to us – above all, in its determination, at the end, to address questions of the utmost and immediate political relevance – is in a very special way, exemplary. The 'perfectly complete and rigorous text' must wait for another moment.⁶⁴⁸

There is an alternative explanation for the structure of the book. This is Poulantzas despairing, admitting to a friend moments before his suicide, only a few months after this book's publication, that his writing has been useless, his books a waste of time, then throwing his books out of the window, and throwing himself after them.⁶⁴⁹

In any event, let us turn now to a detailed consideration of this final book, and see whether or not Hall's assessment stands up to critical analysis. In the very first page, in the Preface, we certainly face an emotional Poulantzas – one who is full of political urgency – this much is unchanged, but also someone filled with uncertainty. Here is a sample of this sensibility :

It should be said ... that the attempt to escape from comfortable habit encounters certain problems that I have not always been able, or know how, to avoid. These all come down to the tendency, in one respect or the other, to do both too much and not enough. In the theoretical sense, I could not deal with all the problems that arise in these fields, but nor could I exhaust all the ones I do tackle. The text therefore has no systematic order ... For there can be no such thing as orthodox Marxism. No-one

⁶⁴⁵ Of course, Poulantzas could hardly be blamed for not understanding Thatcherism, since Thatcher did not come to power until after Poulantzas had died.

⁶⁴⁶ Hall, pages xvi-xvii.

⁶⁴⁷ Hall, page xvii.

⁶⁴⁸ Hall, page xviii.

⁶⁴⁹ 'The Nicos Poulantzas I Knew,' interview with Michael Lowy, Verso Books website, retrieved December 2, 2016. Michael Löwy was speaking to Alexis Cukier, Razmig Keucheyan and Fabio Mascaro Querido. Translated by David Broder. Mike Watson is listed as the author of the article. Retrieved from <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1908-michael-lowy-the-nicos-poulantzas-i-knew>.

can presume to behave as the keeper of holy dogmas and texts ; and nor have I sought to clothe myself in them. It is not that I claim so speak in the name of some genuine Marxism, but rather the opposite. I assume responsibility for what I write and speak only in my name.⁶⁵⁰

How is one to read this beginning if not as a loss of faith, an apostasy? When we remember back to the beginnings of the Poulantzian journey, we are startled by his absolute surety in the first pages of *Political Power and Social Classes*, in which a Marxist science of the social world is carefully proposed, with an intense rigour, clarity and thoroughness insisted upon. Coupled with this, there is a powerful emphasis on the structure of the argument throughout the book, so that completeness and orthodoxy are everywhere on display. Then, as we read the books that follow, Poulantzas certainly bears the mantle of orthodox Marxism very proudly, celebrating the brilliancy of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci in particular, correcting, adjusting and completing their writings to be sure, but always in a reverential tone. This is the task of polishing and shining what already illuminates the theoretical and political skies. Thus, when he admits that no-one can be the keeper of the faith, he can be speaking of no-one but himself, a role he now rids himself of. No longer will he speak for Marxism, but rather for himself, and himself alone. The horror of not being able to say enough on any topic, not to be able to solve the many problems of the Left – the text is transparently self-confessional. This is a sharp auto-critique, and what follows are disparate thoughts, an inevitable incoherence.⁶⁵¹

“On the Theory of the State”⁶⁵² underlines the significance of the State and state power, a topic, that, apparently, in 1978, was on everybody’s lips. The key question during the 20th century among political theorists has been the relationship between the State,⁶⁵³ power and social classes. All political theory during this time has either been Marxist, or an attack on Marxism. But the key question still remains – what is the relationship between the State and the dominant classes? A variety of answers has been proposed, but the most common one is the State as an instrument of the ruling elements. Others see the State on one side and class struggle on the other.⁶⁵⁴ Yet further arguments focus on the State’s increasing power and its influence over the economic sphere.

Poulantzas then returns to arguments proposed by his earlier books. The State, he reminds us, has always been involved in the relations of production. Political, economic and ideological elements are bound up, one with another, from the first. The State has never been separate from the economic, and in the present phase of monopoly capitalism, this remains true. No general theory of the state is possible, but it is certainly appropriate to propose a regional theory of the capitalist State. No general theory of the State is found in the Marxist classics. Indeed, Poulantzas claims, it is to the great merit of Marxist theory that it throws aside grand claims to theories that explain everything :

... it is precisely one of the merits of Marxism that ... it thrusts aside the grand metaphysical flights of so-called political philosophy – the vague and nebulous theorizations of an extreme generality and abstractness that lay claim to lay bare the great secrets of History, the Political, the State, and Power.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁰ *SPS*, pages 7-8.

⁶⁵¹ While we can appreciate the generosity of Hall’s comments about a fallen comrade, the openness we can perhaps see in Poulantzas’s book is rather more chaotic and less consciously creative than Hall proposes.

⁶⁵² *SPS*, pages 11-27.

⁶⁵³ As with his first two books, he returns to capitalizing the word ‘State’, so I follow his convention in the following discussion.

⁶⁵⁴ He is referring to Henri Weber in this aside.

⁶⁵⁵ *SPS*, page 21. This seems, evidentially, to be an attack on Foucault and the ‘New Philosophers’, but it could equally be said to be an attack on his own early attempts, following Althusser, to establish a ‘science of society’ in Marx’s name.

He thinks of some emerging new claims to knowledge as ‘escapism’ in the face of crisis, flooding ‘the concept market’ with the grand ideas of ‘The Master’. But the problems at hand are too serious to be dealt with by such foolish writings.⁶⁵⁶ This does not mean that there are no problems with the Marxist theory of the State, but none the less, Marxist theorising presents the only sensible way forward. But just as there can be no general theory of the State, nor can there be a single theory of the transition from capitalism to socialism. Then follows a rambling section that makes uncertain philosophical points in order to skewer the pretensions of the New Philosophers. In these pages,⁶⁵⁷ Poulantzas makes general comments about the space between theory and the real, and he argues that Marx, Jesus, Rousseau and Voltaire are no more responsible for outrages committed in their name than anyone else. Marxism is not able to provide ‘an infallible formula’ to resolve problems any more than any other system of thought. This could not be a more defensive Poulantzas. We are now far from the reaches of Marxist science here, instead reduced here to defending what has appeared to many to be Marxist dogma in the face of sharp attacks from the right.

The early material in the book is surprising. Having suggested that he will reiterate his theoretical achievements of the past, he reviews very little of this ground-breaking theoretical work, but instead turns his attention to his critics, thus suggesting by default that little has been achieved theoretically. On page twenty five, he seems to catch himself, however, and he spends the last two pages of the chapter outlining his case. Thus we must be reminded that while the relations of production ‘delimit the given field of the State’,⁶⁵⁸ the State has a role in establishing these social relationships. The State is bound up with the relations of production through class struggle. The State’s relative autonomy⁶⁵⁹ from the economy establishes the structure of the social formation. Political and ideological relations form a large part of this structure. They neither consist of simple extensions of the relations of production, nor are they external to them. They are central to our understanding of classes and class struggle. Thus classes never reproduce themselves without the involvement of political and ideological elements. The economy is never ‘by itself’. Thus the system of domination and exploitation established by capitalism involves economic, political and ideological elements every step of the way. There are no classes outside class struggle, and thus the State is engaged with this struggle from the first.

What is unsettling about this material – the introduction to his last book on the State - is Poulantzas’s failure to provide a thorough account of his own achievements, achievements that he appears to overlook and discount, as if events and alternate theories have over-run him. For example, he makes no mention of the theory of relative autonomy, and doesn’t use the term here, even though it is a central element of his State theory. It is everywhere implied, but the naming of the term would certainly help his case, as would an indication of its power to explain. There is no discussion of the ‘isolation effect’, or of the role of the State in uniting the bourgeoisie and of the ‘power bloc’, nor how the State acts to disorganise the popular masses. Instead there is a half-hearted attempt to dismiss critics and alternative arguments – the stuffing seems to have gone out of him for the moment.

⁶⁵⁶ He refers particularly to B.H. Lévy (*La barbarie à visage humain*, Paris, Éditions Grasset, 1977) and André Glucksmann (*Les maîtres penseurs*, Éditions Grasset, Paris, 1977) in this passage.

⁶⁵⁷ *SSS*, pages 22-25.

⁶⁵⁸ *SSS*, page 25, his phrase.

⁶⁵⁹ Though this is not a phrase he uses here. The argument, none the less, is familiar.

In the second chapter⁶⁶⁰ he returns to the question of ideology. In his debate with Miliband, he had argued that neither he nor Miliband, though both have discerned the importance of ideology in explaining the State, have done a good enough job in explaining it. Here he attempts to complete the task. The State is not merely repression shielded by ideology. Indeed, ideology comprises a series of ‘material practices’⁶⁶¹ They are fundamental to the process of ownership and possession. If violence is the legitimate domain of State action, then ideology legitimizes that violence. And it is always class ideology, embodied in the State apparatuses. He refers again to his earlier argument that the ideological State apparatuses refer to structures of the State itself, such as State education, as well as institutions outside the State that undertake the same kind of ideological work, such as the Church.

Repression is certainly fundamental to the State’s workings. The establishment and maintenance of power certainly depends on the capacity to coerce and threaten the body.⁶⁶² The body can be conceived itself as a political institution. The State both coerces bodies directly through repression, but also determines how those bodies should be formed :

As a material reality, the State is synonymous with a kind of stunting regimentation and consumption of persons’ bodies – in other words, with its incarnation in the very flesh of the subject-objects of the state violence ...⁶⁶³

Gramsci may have been right to extend discussion into the realm of ideology, but this form of analysis suggest either the State acts repressively, or it does so through lies, illusions and falsehoods. In the Althusserian view⁶⁶⁴ the State acts to set down the rules that must be followed in order that the economy can work. Political power thus ‘frames the economy’. But this tells us very little about how the State actually operates. Instead, we must see the State as creating the reality in which the economy works. The State is thus not merely repressive, but rather continually undertakes tasks to the material benefit of the popular masses. Thus the ideological activities of the State cannot be reduced simply to propaganda or repression.

The State is also accused of providing an all-concealing mask of secrecy that covers all its activities. But no such claim can be sustained. The State produces a variety of discourses, as it undertakes its work to reproduce the power bloc, and to sustain the social formation of a class-divided society :

The truth of power often escapes the popular masses. But the State does not intentionally conceal it from everyone: rather, for infinitely more complex reasons, the masses do not manage to hear the state discourse directed by the dominant classes.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁰ Chapter Two, ‘The Ideological Apparatus : Does the State equal repression plus Ideology?’, *State, Power, Socialism*, pages 28-34.

⁶⁶¹ *SPS*, 28.

⁶⁶² Here we see the impact of Foucault’s thought for the first time. The introduction to *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), is invoked by this passage. *Discipline and Punish* was first published in French in Paris by Gallimard in 1975.

⁶⁶³ *SPS*, page 29. This could be Foucault writing. Poulantzas, who has scrupulously avoided any discussion of individuals, except through discussion of the emergence of individual citizens with the rise of the bourgeois democratic State and the ‘isolation effect’, is now talking about the impact of the State on the human body.

⁶⁶⁴ Poulantzas is citing Althusser’s ‘Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses’, from *Lenin and Philosophy*, New Left Books, 1971.

⁶⁶⁵ *SPS*, page 33.

Furthermore, to speak only of repression-ideology leads to some further foolish formulations. In this alternate view now being proposed, there are only repressive and ideological State apparatuses. Thus the economic State apparatuses disappear. And a variety of apparatuses can move from one sphere to another, depending on circumstances. Thus the State can only be seen as repressive-ideological at the purely descriptive level.

In 'State, Powers and Struggles,'⁶⁶⁶ Poulantzas completes the introduction to the book. Class struggle is very much an activity in which the State engages, and in which it is involved in class reproduction. The early attempts at Marxist theorising failed to account for State activity, as we know, but more recent attempts have been accused of reducing all power to State power.⁶⁶⁷ Class powers, associated with the establishment, management and reproduction of the economy, are central to any capitalist formation. These powers then become exhibited in the struggle between exploiters and exploited in the class struggle. Thus Foucault and Deleuze are at fault in suggesting that relations of power sit outside in other relationships, beyond economic relations. In fact, power starts with classes in capitalism, and with the economy. And again, contrary to Foucault and Deleuze, power is not reduced to the State. Indeed, power relations go far beyond the State. All the apparatuses of hegemony are involved with power, and they are doing the work of the State.

Here Poulantzas seems to have fallen into a trap he has set for himself. He is following up his old argument that many institutions do the ideological work of the State, such as the Church, and thus should be included within the State. In this view, nothing is beyond the State, and Foucault and Deleuze are correct – power cannot escape the State. But he escapes the noose quite quickly when he reminds us that social classes and class struggle also exist well beyond the State. And even while the present capitalist state is extending its powers ever further, class powers still stretch beyond the State. Thus, while Poulantzas is certainly claiming power outstrips the reach of the State, he is not allowing that any meaningful source of power can outrun social classes and the class struggle.

Ideological struggles, he claims, always go beyond the State, a somewhat contradictory comment, and these ideological struggles always involve power. And we must remember another key point. If classes outrun the State, it is because they have primacy over the State apparatus. But does this mean that in order to escape the vision of a totalizing state, we have to put the State to one side? This is not the Poulantzian view. He wants here to reassert the State's role of maintaining a class-divided society. This is in contrast to some syndicalist and libertarian views that push the State to one side, a vision that hardly connects with reality at all, but is merely wishful thinking. In order to further the cause of the socialist revolution, the State must be taken seriously, and the dual strategy of parliamentary democracy along with direct, rank-and-file democracy, must be followed. As soon as class struggle comes into being, the State emerges as a political power.⁶⁶⁸ Thus the State marks out the delineations of class struggle from the first :

It organizes the market and property relations ; it institutes political domination and establishes the politically dominant class ; and it stamps and codifies all forms of the social division of labour – all social reality – within the framework of a class-divided society.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁶ Chapter Three, and the last part of the introduction, *SPS*, pages 35-46.

⁶⁶⁷ This appears to be the Foucauldian critique hovering in the background.

⁶⁶⁸ *SPS*, page 39.

⁶⁶⁹ *SPS*, page 39.

In any class-divided society, this is the case. Thus if all history is the history of class struggle, then the State was there from the first. This means the end of class struggle will result in the end of the State.

What are the ‘New Philosophers’ doing? They are proposing that the State is the founding principle of every social relation, of every form of social reality. Thus all power is reduced to the State, a theory outside Marxism. This suggests there can be no struggle of any kind except through the relations between persons. Marxism thus claims :

1. Class power is the cornerstone of power in class-divided societies.
2. Political power is primordial.
3. In capitalism, political power occupies a field distinct from others, and which intersects with other fields.
4. This power is concentrated in the State, which is the central ‘site of the exercise of power’.⁶⁷⁰

Foucault and Deleuze reject this set of propositions and instead propose that power is everywhere in every social situation. Thus classes, class struggle and the State are under-estimated. This suggests an old pluralist argument about the widely distributed nature of power. What seems particularly absurd is that this claim towards the importance of micro-powers is happening just at a time when the State is claiming more and more power to itself. In contrast it must be argued that:

The state plays a constitutive role not only in the relations of production and the powers which they realize, but also in the totality of power relations at every level of society.⁶⁷¹

Poulantzas appears to be pulling back here from a modified position in which the State is only partly the source of power back towards a totalising argument in which the State is everything again. But clearly he wants to end on a critical note towards the theory of statism –that the state is everything. Struggles are everything, he seems finally to be claiming, and the State has the role of managing these struggles, an argument we have heard many times before.

In his introduction to this volume, Stuart Hall argues that the section on ‘The Institutional Materiality of the State’⁶⁷² is the most original part of the book. Poulantzas starts this chapter by reviewing his earlier works. He reminds us of the problem at hand – that we cannot see the state as a separate apparatus of political domination somehow ‘off to one side’, as it were, but rather in its relationship to the relations of production and the social division of labour. This argument that the state is constituted by class struggle and social classes is entirely familiar. Then he rehearses the argument he made in *Political Power and Social Classes* :

The question I tried to answer in *Political Power and Social Classes* was the following : why, in order to assert its political domination, does the bourgeoisie dispose of the quite specific state apparatus that is the capitalist state – the modern representative State, the national-popular class State? From where does this State’s original material framework derive?⁶⁷³

As so often with Poulantzas’s writing, we are thrown off our stride here with his exposition of his argument in *Political Power and Social Classes*. What is he trying to infer with the phrase ‘the

⁶⁷⁰ SPS, page 44. I paraphrase the listen given here.

⁶⁷¹ SPS, page 45.

⁶⁷² SPS, pages 49-120. This constitutes Part One of three parts.

⁶⁷³ SPS, page 49.

bourgeoisie dispose of the quite specific state apparatus’?⁶⁷⁴ Presumably he is leading us in the direction of the theory of ‘relative autonomy’ but this is not at all clear until the next few sentences, where he confirms that the ‘the materiality (of the State) results from the relative separation of the State and the relations of production under capitalism’.⁶⁷⁵ Thus the state is organised into its various apparatuses (courts, army, administration, police etc.) and ‘representative institutions’, such as parliament and the voting system, as a result of its relation to the social division of labour established under a particular capitalist régime.⁶⁷⁶ He then rehearses his old argument about the instrumentalist theories of the State within Marxist orthodoxy, as well as theories of the separation of the State from ‘civil society’, hardly an innocent term. The process in which the capitalist state emerges thus creates an abstract formalism in which individual citizens are ‘free’ to exercise their rights in the labour-capital markets under the rule of law. Civil society thus comprises a contractual relationship between the State and the individual. In *Political Power and Social Classes*, Poulantzas tries to argue against such theories. The problems with such an approach are now transparently obvious for the Poulantzas reader who has reached this stage of his writing. Nowhere in this latter formulation is there any place for the class struggle.

Recent work in France and elsewhere has pushed the field substantially forward, but still old problems persist. Criticisms of his work have arisen, calling it ‘politicist’, suggesting he is guilty of failing to connect the State and the economy. Other theorists have tried to derive the nature of the capitalist state from the structure of the economy. (so-called derivationist theories) Either such theories fall back into the ‘exchange, circulation of capital, creation of individual citizens’ model, which seeks to derive the structures of the State in this way, or the State is derived from its specific economic activities. But again the ‘essential point’⁶⁷⁷ is missed. These activities are not the primary functions of the State. And these forms of explanation do not allow us to understand the ‘peculiar’ and singular nature of the bourgeois-democratic state, whose purpose is to establish and maintain national unity in the face of a class-divided society. The State is not just the instrument of class domination, but neither is it merely an appendage to the economic system. Rather, the central role of the State is to manage class struggle.

In the last paragraph of this section, Poulantzas offers a self-criticism of *Political Power and Social Classes*. The book was published during the May 1968 events, and this event and others like it blew away many old misconceptions. It is Poulantzas’s view that he paid too little attention to the social division of labour, an error he corrected in relation to social classes in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, and which he plans to correct in relation to the State in this volume.

In Chapter One, Part One, Poulantzas focuses on mental and manual labour, knowledge and power. We can see Foucauldian references emerging again, and we can also see the reference to his extended treatment of mental and manual labour that so characterised several chapters *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. The capitalist state is, in part, a rule-governed juridical structure established to carry out the bureaucratic functions of the capitalist economic system. Feudalism depends on kinship ties. The distinguishing features of the modern State, in contrast, involve the separation of the political from the economic. The producer is dispossessed from the products of labour, in contrast to the feudal economic structure.

⁶⁷⁴ *SPS*, page 49.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ This listing occurs on page 49.

⁶⁷⁷ His phrase, page 52.

Fundamental to the rise of the bourgeois State is the development of a radically new social division of labour. One of the cleavages that becomes fundamental to this shift is the increasing distinction between mental and manual labour, which becomes separated as the capitalist system emerges. This cleavage has particular importance in establishing a particular form of the State, because :

... the State incarnates intellectual labour as separated from manual labour.⁶⁷⁸

There thus establishes in this newly-forming State a close alliance between intellectual labour, political domination, power and knowledge. The state apparatuses 'involve the practical supremacy of a knowledge and discourse ... from which the popular masses are excluded'.⁶⁷⁹ The State enjoys a permanent monopoly over these powers. Thus intellectual labour, which he also calls 'knowledge-power', is 'materialised in state apparatuses'. Gramsci expressed this understanding by terming agents of the state apparatus *intellectuals*.⁶⁸⁰

Theorists of the State have routinely referred to the scientific nature of the emerging State and to the 'apodictic *episteme*'⁶⁸¹ that establishes the law and politics as practical and legitimate activities. Thus there is a claim made that the State has access to a form of fundamental ideology that allows the State and its agents to be the bearers of a profound knowledge and authority. Science now has become incorporated into the structure of the State, and has become part of its discourse. And thus intellectuals have become an '*intellectual scientific corps*'⁶⁸² in the service of the new State structure.

Pre-capitalist States came to an understanding of legitimacy through divine revelation, in the form of a Prince or a King. The modern State bases its legitimacy on its sovereignty over the nation-state. The discourse it now employs is one of strategy and planning based on science. State discourse has no particular unity, and what is especially important is that its discourse is understood. Thus it must establish a national discourse through which it must be heard. The State's knowledge and power must then be lodged within the structures of the State :

Down to the last detail, the framework of the capitalist State incarnates the capitalist division between intellectual and manual labour.⁶⁸³

In this process, writing plays a significant role in distinguishing mental work from manual work, and establishing the codes to be followed under the new régime. Through 'state writing', the knowledge of the new discourse is spread far and wide. In establishing a certain monopoly over speech, knowledge and writing, the popular masses are excluded from the levers of power.⁶⁸⁴ This does not mean that the relation between the State and the relations of production can be reduced to the distinction between mental and manual labour. Rather Poulantzas is suggesting that the State is not formed merely by commodity relations. But the State does actively engage in the economy –

⁶⁷⁸ *SPS*, page 56. Italics in the original. Poulantzas uses 'state' and 'State' in different locations in this text. He uses 'State' when we are talking about 'The State', but he uses 'the state apparatus' when the word is used adjectively. I follow his usage here in the present writing.

⁶⁷⁹ Poulantzas's phrase, *SPS*, page 56.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.* The italics are in the original.

⁶⁸¹ Forms of knowledge that are beyond question. This phrase appears on page 57.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

⁶⁸³ *SPS*, page 59.

⁶⁸⁴ This new line of argument resonates closely with Bourdieu's work on the origins of the State and the monopoly over legitimate discourse.

through training of the workforce, through the family, the school and various specialised training programs, and through the vast variety of cultural and ideological organs (media, cultural apparatuses, parliamentary and party systems) that support the economic system.

In the case of France, it is clear that the State gained its original hegemony through the use of a corps of licenced intellectuals. It ensured their loyalty by rewarding them in certain ways. This created a cadre of bureaucratic workers that are strongly opposed to fascism, but very distant from the struggles of the popular masses. This leads to an anti-intellectualism among workers, and a distrust of the State apparatuses.

In 'Individualisation'⁶⁸⁵, Poulantzas focuses on what he has earlier called the 'isolation effect' – the process by which the rise of the modern State leads to the emergence of the individual, State-structured citizen who forms the basis of the bourgeois-democratic social formation. This process he calls the 'atomization' of the citizenry. At the same time, the State claims sovereignty over the monadic structure of citizenship that it has created. This individuation does not arise from the market and commodity exchange, but from the social relations of production in which the 'worker' is formed as a free, 'naked' individual who confronts the needs of the workplace. This process establishes a material 'frame of reference' for the process of individuation. Such a phenomenon is clearly seen in the structure of Taylorism, in which each worker has a slot in the economic system, and in which all work is then systematised, timed and structured in a linear, rigorous and logical format. From these beginnings, the State inscribes into its very structure the elements of the workplace. But the State does not merely reflect the materiality of the economy. Instead it actively participates in its formation. And it aids the process of individuation through the instruments of ideology. This form of ideology serves to mask and obscure the class-divided nature of society. It also forges individuality through a series of techniques of knowledge which Foucault calls *disciplines*.⁶⁸⁶ In the end, though, the story of the rise of the State does not begin and end with the body as a political institution, as Foucault proposes, or with the body as a consumer. Instead the origins of the State and of individuation result from the social division of labour.

A critique of Foucault, through Deleuze, then follows. Deleuze is at pains to point out the differences between the Marxist position and Foucault's arguments. While Poulantzas is willing to give credit to Foucault's work for, we might infer, filling in concretely some of the gaps left by Poulantzas's continually abstract and abstruse theorising, this is no easy intellectual cosying up. Poulantzas is at pains to point out how Foucault resists mentioning classes at any cost.⁶⁸⁷ And then he subjects Foucault to a three-way criticism. First, he argues that, with Deleuze, he is part of the idealist camp. Second, this has the effect of creating a neo-functionalist approach of Parsonian dimensions. Finally, Foucault's account is characterized as a 'second-order epistemological discourse'.⁶⁸⁸

Instead, he wants to make a very different case from that proposed by Foucault's mysterious workings. Poulantzas reminds us that in *Political Power and Social Classes* he had already referred to the 'isolation effect' to refer to the way in which the State, through its juridical and ideological apparatuses, created the separate, unique individual citizens required in a bourgeois-democratic

⁶⁸⁵ *SPS*, Chapter Two, part One, pages 63-75.

⁶⁸⁶ *SPS*, page 66. A direct use of Foucault's concept appears here.

⁶⁸⁷ *SPS*, page 67.

⁶⁸⁸ *SPS*, page 68.

State. But now he turns from critique to acknowledge Foucault's contribution in setting out the details by which power shapes the corporality of the subjects over which the State has dominion.

Poulantzas then turns aside abruptly to take up the issue of totalitarianism again. He returns to *Political Power and Social Classes*, and engages in further self-criticism. What he failed to see before is that while the State creates individual citizens, the freedom thus formed dissolves in the face of the State's power to dominate society in general and impose the general will. There is no limit under bourgeois political ideology to the degree that the State will intervene in the private sphere. And this capacity has within it the seeds of totalitarianism. The family is simply an institution proscribed by the State, and thus is formed, shaped and managed by the State. Thus the establishment of individualism opens up for the State new vistas of power.⁶⁸⁹ Representative democracy still comprises a method by which the popular struggles and resistance are inscribed in the State, even though the dominant classes manage the higher reaches of the State apparatus.

Poulantzas now turns to the topic of the law and terror.⁶⁹⁰ He picks this up as the third of four examples of the institutional materiality of the State at work. In this arena, as well as others, the State takes a particular form under capitalism that was not present before. The establishment of law was supposed to protect the citizenry from arbitrary violence. Unfortunately, most régimes of the past, full of violence and attacks on citizens, have been based on law, Stalin's 1936 constitution being perhaps the most appalling. As Weber reminds us, this is the state with the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, and over the capacity to wage war. Thus the law and violence are closely tied together. The State organizes the conditions for physical repression. Foucault makes a similar claim in *La Volonté de Savoir*.⁶⁹¹ Here he argues that the opposition established between legality and terror is false, because the two have always gone together. Second, he argues that modern societies exercise power in more subtle ways than in the past. These new methods rest on technique and normalisation, on control, not on punishment :

As Castel puts it, following Foucault, the exercise of power involves a passage from authority-coercion to manipulation-persuasion ; in other words, the famous 'internalization' of repression by the dominated masses.⁶⁹²

Foucault may under-estimate the role of the law and the State. He may also fail to understand the role of the repressive state apparatus. There is another argument that must be dismissed – the view that modern power is not based on repression and physical violence, but rather on manipulation, the organization of consent and the 'internalization of repression'.⁶⁹³ This view emerges in the early bourgeois State, a period that gave rise to the view that the State would limit violence, and from which an argument developed that was taken up by the Frankfurt School, carried through to Marcuse, as well as Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence – the idea of the softening of violence. The argument has two main parts – the under-estimation of the role of physical violence, and a notion that power consists entirely in the relationship between repression and ideology, and that this relationship comprises a zero-sum logic – more of one means less of the other. There is little difference in these forms of analyses from those that argue that consent lies in the hearts and minds of the masses, or lies in the love of the Master. All these forms of analysis ignore the role of

⁶⁸⁹ *SPS*, page 72.

⁶⁹⁰ *SPS*, pages 76-92.

⁶⁹¹ *L'Histoire de la sexualité ; la volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, 1976, Paris.

⁶⁹² *SPS*, page 77. The Castel reference is to R. Castel, *Le psychoanalyse*, Paris, 1976, Éditions de Minuit, page 288ff.

⁶⁹³ *SPS*, page 78.

physical repression. Such reasoning looks for the sources of obedience. The law is seen as a codification of repression. Foucault's notion of the positivity of power is also dramatically misplaced, since it avoids the issue of repression and the role of ideology in the system of consent. He, too, plays down the role of physical violence. While Foucault usefully introduces the concept of 'normalization', he ignores much else. He fails to account for the sources of resistance of which he is much enamoured. Physical violence must be involved because struggles and resistance are ubiquitous. And struggles (one imagines Poulantzas is inferring class struggles) are always at the centre of power.

Weber was correct in suggesting the State has the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. European states were constituted in the shadow of feudal conflicts. The rise of the law took place as the State gained a monopoly over violence. As this monopoly was established, the use of violence was reduced, but its capacity was always there. Thus violence always plays a determining role in the rise of State institutions – schools, universal suffrage, cultural institutions – it is always there, hidden but available :

To take just one example, the national army is consubstantial⁶⁹⁴ with parliament and the capitalist school. But this consubstantiality does not rest only on a common institutional materiality stemming from the social division of labour ... it also rests on the fact that the national army, as an explicit part of the state monopoly of legitimate physical violence, gives rise to the forms of existence and operation of institutions – parliament, school – in which violence does not have to be materialized as such. The regular existence of and even the constitution of a law-enacting parliament is unthinkable without the modern national army.⁶⁹⁵

The argument that physical violence lies behind the institutions of the State seems entirely plausible. The notion that they are made of the same 'material', whatever that is, seems confused and unconvincing. The argument is more convincing when he reminds us how close this violence is – the three contemporary dictatorships are the best example, but there are many immediate examples of police violence to call upon. To ignore the power of the state when it is called upon in a variety of crisis conditions seems an entirely sensible criticism of alternative theories.

The law is more than prohibition. It has, since Roman and Greek times, also promoted positive behaviour. Law does not only stop people speaking. Sometimes it compels them to speak, as in the case of bearing witness, taking part in legal proceedings, denouncing people and so on. But the law's main purpose is to create consent. Law makes material the dominant ideology, and it masks the violence of the State. It provides a version of ruling class reality, and organises the consent of the dominant classes, providing guidance on the locations that people must occupy in the class structure. But it also creates and sustains a system of '*real rights*'⁶⁹⁶ for the dominated classes. What this suggests is that the hand of the State stretches far beyond the reach of the law. The State does not always follow 'the rules' and State activity often outruns the law. In many cases the State acts against the law. Every State can declare a 'state of emergency' in which the nation is at risk, and the rule-book can be discarded. In a class-divided society, it is always the State that takes primacy over the law. The law is never just words, just language. Repression is never far away.

The law comprises an abstract set of rules. Some have argued that under capitalism, individual subjects can be seen as entering the sphere of the circulation of capital and commodity-exchange, and are thus to be considered as 'free traders'. But the character of the modern state and modern

⁶⁹⁴ Made of the same substance, a most unusual word.

⁶⁹⁵ *SPS*, page 81.

⁶⁹⁶ *SPS*, page 84, italics in the original.

law needs to be grasped within the structure of a class-divided society. The abstract nature of the law is closely connected to the task of the law to establish social cohesion in a world in which producers are dispossessed of the product of their labour. The law inscribes the separateness of individuals, while simultaneously constructing the unity of the social world :

... it also helps to establish and consecrate individual and class differences within its very structure, while at the same time setting itself up as a cohesive and organizing system of their *unity-homogenization*.⁶⁹⁷

The sacred becomes the law as societies move from the feudal to the capitalist form of society. The law replaces religion as the discourse of legitimation. It forms the cement on which dominant ideology rests. The law represents a framework for social cohesion. Modern law is able to express the relation between power and knowledge. It gives expression to the process whereby the intellectual elements of production are separated from the producers to the benefit of the ruling class and the State. Thus, in one sense, every state agent is an intellectual because he (sic.) needs to know the law. But the popular masses, ignorant of the law in most cases, remain subject to the agents of the State.

Poulantzas now turns to his last case study – that of the nation. There is, he says, no Marxist theory of the nation. The term appears to mean ‘something else’ other than the State. The idea of the nation may appear in the transition from feudal to capitalist society. Thus even the Marxist classics argue that the nation will survive even the ‘withering away of the state’ in communist, classless society.⁶⁹⁸ What, then, is the reality of the nation? It seems clear that the State cannot encapsulate the idea of the ‘nation’. It has both a specific character, and it is, at the same time, bound up with the State. The State seems generally to encompass a single nation, and modern nations exhibit the tendency to form their own States. According to certain economic arguments, the capitalist state requires the internal unity of a market. Thus the State acts to homogenize the environment within the nation to ensure the smooth working of the market. In this view, the State’s specific function is to establish, under law, a society in which individual citizen-subjects can engage in the realm of commodity-fetishism, workers are free to work, and owners are free to make money. But such an argument is very limited, and prevents us from analyzing what is present in the modern nation. In the first place, the circulation of commodities is only part of what is going on. For one thing, there is nothing that suggests that the creation of the market should occur at the level of the nation. And it also presupposes a very clear idea of what constitutes the nation – common territory, common language, common traditions – these elements are proposed frequently as trans-historical elements of a social formation which is unalterable. And these same elements are then considered to be the building blocks of the emerging modern State of capitalism. But why should these elements be the components of the nation and the origins of the modern State?

If territory, language and historical tradition constitute the nation, then in the present world-system setting, it would be easy to argue that the nation is dissolving. But, Poulantzas argues, the emerging world-system has done nothing to reduce the role of the State, and thus not of the nation. Territory and tradition have quite novel meanings under present conditions. A conceptual matrix of space and time have been orchestrated by the latest phase of monopoly capitalism. Traditional historians have already written about the changes in world view and ways of thinking associated with the shift to capitalism. In Marxism, these questions of space and time have been side-lined as issues relating

⁶⁹⁷ *SPS*, page 87. Italics in the original

⁶⁹⁸ *SPS*, page 93.

to the cultural and ideological spheres, and thus of little importance. However, these issues are fundamental to the social division of labour. These matrices appear in the materiality of the State. The State forms these matrices in its own sphere of domination and power. Within these matrices, it is able to form a conception of the nation (economic unity, territory, tradition). The nation acquires ‘flesh and blood’⁶⁹⁹ through the actions of the State.

First, then, what of territoriality? Spatial matrices clearly vary with the mode of production. We need to follow the sequence of events in which towns emerge from the country, in which communications, transport and military apparatuses develop, and in which territories and boundaries are established, all mechanism by which social space is organized. None of this development follows a simple pattern. Indeed, discontinuity is at the heart of it. Space usage changes profoundly with the change in the mode of production, but never simply.

Pre-capitalist states establish a space that is ‘*continuous, homogenous, symmetrical, reversible and open*’.⁷⁰⁰ But such states have no clear external boundary, as do modern States. They are States that look inward. For some writers, (Deleuze-Guattari) feudal, personal bonds, the links between peasant and the soil result in the ‘territorialization’ of space and social relations, but the freeing of the direct producer in capitalism results in ‘deterritorialization’.

Surprisingly, people moved a great deal in the middle ages. Poulantzas comments :

In point of fact, people have never moved about as much as they did in the Middle Ages ; peasant migration, both individual and collective, was a major demographic phenomenon in medieval society. On the road were to be found knights, peasants travelling during the rotation period of crops and fields, merchants, clerics, either undertaking a regular trip or running away from their monasteries, students, pilgrims of all kinds, crusaders – it was the great age of the wanderer.⁷⁰¹

This is an arresting claim, but a claim that Poulantzas seems to document with a long list of examples. But to suggest that the peasantry of the Middle Ages moved more than people in contemporary capitalism does seem misguided. His point is to argue that the sovereign power of the State lives within the individual body of the peasant. Religion reigned everywhere, however much movement might or might not have occurred. The writing here is fluid, literary in tone, and full of ambiguity, a far cry from the reaches of abstract formalism by which we were beset in *Political Power and Social Classes*. Here the key issue on which he focuses is the issue of territory. If the producer is now separated from the means of labour, as happened under large-scale machine production of the 19th century, then the spatial matrix is necessarily changed. The spatial matrix of the new society is ‘*serial, fractured, parcelled, cellular and irreversible*’.⁷⁰² These conditions reflect the Taylorist nature of the production line. This new matrix has breaks, gaps, fracturings and divisions built into it, and it is open-ended, suggesting a global system. In this new space, people change position frequently. At the same time, frontiers become much more important. The new frontiers proscribe the limits of capital and labour.

National territory has nothing to do with the geography of the land – it is entirely political. The modern State is the mechanism, through its various apparatuses, that creates the modern territory of

⁶⁹⁹ Poulantzas’s phrase, page 99.

⁷⁰⁰ *SPS*, page 101. His phrase.

⁷⁰¹ *SPS*, page 102.

⁷⁰² *SPS*, page 103. His phrase, italics in the original.

the nation. The State is embodied in modern individuals created by the new State. National territory is thus merely the space over which the State has control. But territory is only one element of the modern nation. The matters of homogenization and unification also need to be attended to by the State. The State seeks consciously to establish the modern nation. The State also turns to external issues – how to expand markets, capital and territory. Thus the modern State cannot be anything but international, since labour and capital move across national borders. As it aims to expand, the modern State crushes differences, nationalities and languages in the hope of homogenizing societies. Here the roots of totalitarianism are to be found.

Second, Poulantzas concerns himself with temporality. A common history is normally a key element in the establishment of a nation. And it is clear that antiquity and feudalism were at variance on this issue. But in both societies, the means of production were still in the hands of the direct producer ; there is no capitalist division of labour. But these societies are still at the mercy of chance, as in Antiquity, or the eternal verities of the Church, as in Medieval Christianity. There appears to no future and no past. Time is of the present. In medieval feudalism, there is a temporality, it must be admitted. Since there is a Creation and a Last Judgement, history has found a place. The body-politic does not, however, make history. The nature of power does not change, even though sovereigns come and go. But capitalist temporality is quite different. Machine production requires new conditions, and these include :

*... a segmented, serial, equally divided, cumulative and irreversible time that is oriented towards product and, thereby, towards expanded reproduction and capital accumulation.*⁷⁰³

Time now becomes measurable, and there is a strict control of time through a régime of clocks. Capitalist time becomes universal. Modern history now has a progressive quality to it. A scientific conception of society is now possible, as Marx has indicated. But Poulantzas now agrees that the break between ideology and science that was propagated in earlier years (indeed Poulantzas was a party to this Althusserian claim) was far less significant (and less radical) than may have been thought.

This part of the commentary appears as a *volte face* in Poulantzas's reasoning. Long a reverential debater with the classics, and having set himself the task of celebrating, correcting and finishing these classics, he is now entirely unclear about whether he is propagating a Marxist science or not. But to return to the question in hand – he now claims that the modern capitalist State now manages and controls time, schedules, planning, procedures and programs. In this phase of development, the nation and the State come together. The State undertakes the tasks of individualization and unification simultaneously. And it now comes to drive history forward – to plan for the future. The State embodies some traditions and eliminates others in order to secure unity. But this new structuring also has within it the seeds of totalitarianism. The new structure of the State is required for control to be made absolute, or as absolute as actual conditions will allow. It makes possible, for example, the establishment of concentration camps. It makes genocide possible, to root out the 'foreign bodies' with society. And the modern State requires a common language in which to carry out its work.

Third, Poulantzas considers the relationship between classes and the nation. Spatial and temporal matrices arise from the class struggles inherent in capitalism. The modern nation, and thus the State,

⁷⁰³ *SPS*, page 110.

are not merely the product of the bourgeoisie, but result rather from the relationship of forces that exists between modern social classes. How this precisely occurs is clearly a product of specific social conditions in a given social formation. But it is accurate to say that the fundamental core of the nation rests with the capitalist relations of production.⁷⁰⁴ As the various stages of capitalism develop, through primitive accumulation, mercantilist periods, competitive capitalism and monopoly capitalism, so too do the State and the nation take on various forms.

The relationship of the State to the national bourgeoisie depends on the fraction of that class who appear to be dominant. In this case, Poulantzas is talking about the national character of the bourgeoisie, rather than the fraction of the power bloc to which they belong. Thus he is concerned with whether they represent a national bourgeoisie, an international bourgeoisie, or whether this is an ‘internationalized’ bourgeoisie, by which it seems he is referring to a bourgeois class with comprador elements built into it – a bourgeoisie penetrated by international elements. The State always has a class nature, and it takes this nature in part from this relationship to the bourgeoisie, though never entirely, of course. Since the bourgeoisie express self-interest, rather than the interests of the nation as a whole, one can anticipate a series of both betrayals and identifications. The more fundamental issue is that of the relationship between the working class and the State. The particular qualities of the working class vary with social conditions and their particular moment in history. But in this variation lies a problem for the international working class movement, a movement that must overcome these various national differences to be effective. This tendency seems unlikely to emerge, and thus the political prospects for revolution beyond a single country appear dim. Instead, the best that can be hoped for is a national transition to socialism. We now see an old theme repeated, that of the nation-state as the site of class struggle.⁷⁰⁵ Then Poulantzas rehearses a series of questions that he cannot hope to answer, and one senses a feeling of exhaustion in his writing. No longer are there high hopes of scaling the walls of Marxist science and erecting a new edifice.

We are now finished with Part One, the ‘Institutional Materiality of the State’, a very long section that comprises almost half the book, and we turn now to Part Two, ‘Political Struggles’. Here again, we sense Poulantzas treading water, and making little progress against a sea of problems he has yet to solve. There are many repeated arguments, arguments we have heard before many times. But in this section there is a chapter called ‘Towards a Relational Theory of Power’ that does bear fruit, and which does offer up the promise of theoretical progress. But first, we must consider what is new in these early pages of Part Two.⁷⁰⁶

Poulantzas begins by rehearsing yet again the theory of the class-divided nature of the State. When states change their shape, this is a result of fundamental changes in the class structure, and predominantly in the kind of capitalism we are talking about – competitive capitalism, mercantilist capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and so on. This again we have heard before, and one cannot escape the feeling that old arguments are being continually rehashed, and old ground endlessly recovered, as if either to find new inspiration, or to insist on the rightness of his old arguments. In these pages, he argues powerfully against naïve theorizations about the State, and the significant political failings that result. What remains to be done, in his view, is to say more precisely how the class struggle has inscribed its shape into the very nature of the modern State.

⁷⁰⁴ *SPS*, page 117.

⁷⁰⁵ *SPS*, page 119.

⁷⁰⁶ Pages 123-160.

The familiar story of the State's role in managing the power bloc is now retold.⁷⁰⁷ The theory of relative autonomy is revisited, as if for the first time.⁷⁰⁸ The notion of the power bloc is extended over several paragraphs, and Poulantzas appears to be refashioning the argument to fend off critics from the French Communist Party, (the PCF) rather than saying anything new, as if the act of repeating himself continuously will allow them to understand the error of their ways. Then, at the end of page 128, we see something novel emerge :

Some of my earlier formulations may now be made more precise. The (capitalist) State should not be regarded as an intrinsic entity : like 'capital', *it is rather a relationship of force, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form.*⁷⁰⁹

This is certainly a new emphasis, and he takes pains to dissect the various elements of this novel definition. By treating the State as a *relationship*, one can bypass the problems associated with seeing the State as an object or an instrument. It also avoids ceding to the State a will of its own, treating the State as a *subject*, with interests quite separate from class interests. But it is also a *specific material condensation* of a relationship between classes and class fractions.⁷¹⁰ This contrasts to the position of the French Communist Party, which suggests that the State has welded with capitalism, especially in the present condition of monopoly capitalism, though he also comments that recent writings have moved in his direction in seeing the state as 'the condensation of a relationship'. But even in these kinds of formulations problems remain. Classes are still considered external to the State, knocking on the door from without, as it were. Thus classes are seen as influencing the State from outside. But a more useful analysis imagines the State itself to be constructed from class struggle, to be a site of class contradictions, to be the very embodiment of class struggle, especially in its ideological and political forms. Thus we must discard the notion of the State as an instrument that can be wielded by whichever class that can manage it, just as much as we must discard the notion that the State has a will of its own, and can impose that will on society in general. Neither of these approaches will allow us to explain the internal contradictions of the State, which can only be understood through an argument that focuses on the class-divided nature of the State. The complexity of the State allows it to represent and to manage various class interests, interests of the several segments of the power bloc, and simultaneously to manage to allocate real resources to the popular masses. And the contradictions that continually exist among the various classes and class fractions can only be managed by the State.

We must therefore discard the idea of the State as a completely unified and well-orchestrated bureaucratic hierarchy. In fact, the State comprises five essential elements⁷¹¹ : (i) a 'structural mechanism' that filters information (ii) a system of decisions and non-decisions (iii) a system that establishes priorities (iv) a hierarchical system whereby measures are managed towards final execution, and (v) a set of strategies established to deal with day-to-day issues. The State can thus appear incoherent and chaotic. This results from the complicated conditions that exist within the State itself as it grapples with many complex situations. As with other political conditions, there are various factions, clans and fiefdoms that struggle for power, and thus there is no single voice of the

⁷⁰⁷ SPS, page 127.

⁷⁰⁸ At the bottom of page 127, Poulantzas catches himself in this repetition. He comments : 'I have developed these analyses and shall not take them up again.' But then he goes on to rehearse arguments heard many times before.

⁷⁰⁹ SPS, pages 128-129. Italics in the original.

⁷¹⁰ This paraphrases Poulantzas on page 129.

⁷¹¹ This summarizes the argument on page 134.

State calling for action, but many voices. Thus the uncertainty of the State and the unevenness of State policy merely result from the struggles inherent within the state structure.

The State can also be seen as a field of strategy and power networks. This is another way in which to understand the vast array of conflicts and confusions that reign within the State. In spite of all this, the State still displays a unity of state power. It still acts, despite the confusions, the cul-de-sacs, the changes in tactics on behalf of the power bloc and the bourgeoisie, and at the present moment, on behalf of monopoly capital. Unity comes from the very structure of the State, not from the capacity of one class or another to control it.

Thus the connection between monopoly capital and the State is complex. Certain areas of the state become locations to which only privileged members of the ruling class have access. And given these penetrations of the State by dominant interests, we might ask the question – how do the popular masses approach the control of the State in the transition to socialism? Such a strategy would not stop at the control of the State. The entire State apparatus would need to be transformed. This is because a large variety of state apparatuses are already permeated⁷¹² by bourgeois interests. A thorough purging of the apparatus and its agents would thus be required. And even when this is done, it does not mean that a Left government would hold sway. The State is not a simple pyramid, in which control of the top necessarily allows control of the rest of the structure. It is best considered as a field, a strategic field, in which struggles for control routinely take place.⁷¹³ Thus there are many sites of power, and each of these need to be won over if the Left is to succeed.

Poulantzas now turns to the question of the ‘State and Popular Struggles’.⁷¹⁴ Again, old arguments are rehearsed. The State acts in a two-fold fashion, to organize and manage the ‘power bloc’ for the bourgeoisie, since they are unable to do this for themselves, while at the same time disorganizing the broad masses, creating the universe of individuated citizens that apparently have no common interests. Thus the State organizes the relationship between the power bloc and the dominated classes. Popular struggles permeate the State from top to bottom. These struggles extend far beyond the State as well, but they infuse the State at every level. The State provides concrete concessions to the popular masses, and the purpose of the State is not to confront the working class in a ‘to-the-death’ struggle, but rather to hold the social structure together – to maintain social unity in the face of widespread domination and subordination. In this strategy it is commonplace to use elements of the petty bourgeoisie in significant roles in order to split them off from the working class.⁷¹⁵ This was especially true in Italy and France during key periods, and especially during the fascist régimes in Italy and Germany. But the State cannot be said to be in the hands of the popular masses without a dramatic change in State structures. The State is complex, and centres of power can shift as certain areas become more vulnerable. But, as well, the very structure of the State is established to maintain and reproduce the conditions of ‘domination-subordination’⁷¹⁶ that characterise society at large. This does not suggest a ‘siege’ mentality would work, as if the working class could slowly penetrate the State from outside. Instead, the working class has always been in the very heart of the State, but they have yet to change the essential structure of the State.

⁷¹² On page 138, paragraph two, I believe the translator is in error. The phrase ‘..by permutating the sites of real and formal power’ should read ‘by permeating the sites of real and formal power’.

⁷¹³ This form of argumentation precisely parallels Bourdieu’s theory of the field, and elements of Foucault’s formulations, though neither of these references are made.

⁷¹⁴ Part Two, Chapter Two, pages 140-145.

⁷¹⁵ *SPS*, page 142.

⁷¹⁶ The term is used on page 143.

Disunity is routinely prevalent among elements of the power bloc. There is disunity over the nature of political tactics to be employed in relation to the popular masses, disunity over the nature of the bourgeois State and what it should do, and what kind of régime would work best. The popular masses may be inscribed in the State, but they are not circumscribed by it. And on the other side, there is never a single power with a single voice at work.

After this brief chapter, which indeed has little to say about the popular masses and the State, Poulantzas now turns to one of the potentially most interesting elements in the book, the topic of relational theory. In Part Two, Chapter Three, 'Towards a Relational Theory of Power',⁷¹⁷ he extends his new formulations, only briefly glanced at before, into a full-blown argument. Here he engages directly with Michel Foucault, who he names in the first paragraph of the chapter. He admits that the arguments he has proposed in this book so far merely rehash old theories set out before Foucault wrote *Surveiller et punir* and *La volonté de savoir*. He comments :

Some of us did not wait for Foucault before proposing analyses of power with which his own investigations now concur in certain respects – although we cannot but rejoice in this development.⁷¹⁸

This is a fascinating comment since it suggests that Foucault is bringing little to the theoretical table that hasn't already been considered. Poulantzas focuses on Foucault's conception of power, and he uses the following quotation to set the argument up :

Power is not something that is required, seized or shared out ; nor is it something one keeps or lets slip ... It is undoubtedly necessary to adopt a nominalist position : power is neither an institution, nor a structure, nor a certain might with which some are endowed : it is the name given to a complex strategic location within a given society ... Wherever there is power, there is resistance ; and yet, or rather for this very reason, resistance is never in a position of exteriority with regard to power.⁷¹⁹

Poulantzas at first does not appear unsympathetic to such a view. He agrees that power is not a quantity or an object of possession. He claims that in *Political Power and Social Classes* he already deduced that power designates a field of struggle and relations between social classes. Thus power depends on the social relations between agents in particular places. Power in the State refers to the 'power organization'⁷²⁰ of a given class, and how that position is used strategically against other interests. But then Poulantzas turns in a critical direction. Unlike Foucault and Deleuze's proclamations about Marxism, Poulantzas wants to claim that he has never characterised the State as a thing endowed with an intrinsic essence. State power can only ever be the power of a class, and is exhibited through the strategic relationship between classes through the state. The State is the site in which power is exercised. But there are also fundamental differences to be rehearsed with Foucault as well. Power is always embedded for Poulantzas in the structure of exploitation and domination that arises from capitalism. This fundamental condition explains the existence of classes and class struggles. For Foucault, power is situational. But there never seems to be a source of this power, and the resistances that emerge seem to take on the character of guerrilla warfare, brief skirmishes against a fleeting enemy. If power is everywhere, why should there be resistance? Foucault seems to have discovered the source of the resistance to power in the concept of 'pebs'.⁷²¹ 'something in the

⁷¹⁷ *SPS*, pages 146-153.

⁷¹⁸ *SPS*, page 146.

⁷¹⁹ *SPS*, page 146. The citation is to page 123ff. in *La volonté de savoir*.

⁷²⁰ This phrase is used on page 147.

⁷²¹ *SPS*, page 150.

body of society – in classes, groups and even individuals – which somehow escapes the relations of power’.⁷²² But, Poulantzas claims, the concept is empty and meaningless, and in the end nothing is left outside power relations.

Poulantzas concludes with two arguments. ‘The State as a political and social terrain does not exhaust the locations in which power is exhibited. It is a ‘material condensation of forces’.⁷²³ Moreover, the State is not a fortress surrounded by a trench. Rather it is a structure permeated on every side by political struggles. Indeed the dictatorships in Portugal, Greece and Spain collapsed not because of some frontal attack on them, but because of internal contradictions and struggles within them. Whether one plays the game of the State or not depends on the political strategy one choose to employ. But these strategies can also take place elsewhere, in the organs of direct democracy, for example. And one might ponder the question that to take the struggle outside the State is to leave the field open for statism, to the further monopolization of power by the State.

The chapter is, in the end, a great disappointment. Poulantzas does tackle Foucault head on, but his own reformulation is limited. Some uses might have been made of Foucault’s deliberations in outlining, in much greater detail, how power operates in specific locations and particular conditions. The lack of an ‘original source’ for power in Foucault’s work is clearly underlined, and for Poulantzas this always lies within the logic of capitalism, with exploitation and domination, and with classes and class struggle. He might here have added to his theory, allowing other sources of power – between men and women, for example - to add to this general formulation. But he could never give arguments other than class arguments any theoretical weight. Thus, in the end, after a brief skirmish with part of the Foucauldian exposition, he returns to his old theoretical haunts.

He seeks to elaborate on these familiar theoretical positions in his next chapter, ‘The State Personnel’. Here he hopes to show the specific struggles that occur within the State. The State forms social categories, and these categories are not beyond the class structure. And this structuring is separate from the question of the class origins of State personnel. Again, these arguments are familiar. Contradictions and confusions permeate the higher reaches of the State and the power bloc, and these struggles continue throughout the hierarchy. ‘Complexity’, ‘division’, ‘breaches’ are the terms Poulantzas repeatedly uses in these pages to describe what form State action takes within its various apparatuses. But many old arguments are repeated. The notion of the dominant ideology as the cement that holds the state apparatuses together is again rehearsed :⁷²⁴

In this ideology, a neutral State appears as the representative of the general will and interest, and the arbiter among struggling classes ; the state administration or judicial system stands above classes ; the army is the pillar of the nation, the police the guarantor of republican order and civil liberties, and the state administration is the motive force of efficiency and general well-being.⁷²⁵

There is clearly nothing new about this exposition. We have seen such an argument in the Poulantzian texts for ten years. What is new, perhaps, is the clarity of exposition, but this is not new theory, but rather the restating of the old.

⁷²² Foucault, Interview with Michel Foucault, *Révolution logiques*, number 4, Winter, 1977.

⁷²³ *SPS*, page 152.

⁷²⁴ *SPS*, page 155.

⁷²⁵ *SPS*, page 156.

State personnel are able to work for the popular masses under the banner of justice and fairness for all, but they are up against the limits of the State as the manager of the bourgeois social order. Thus they cannot fundamentally question the functions of the State and their role in that social order. If the left were to control the State, there would still remain much to do. The State personnel might 'shift to the left', and some personnel might well have sympathies with the left, but the institutional materiality of the State means that only so much can be done without a wholesale restructuring of the State apparatuses. Thus it is only by understanding that the elements of domination and subordination are inscribed into the very structure of the State that we can understand how such a transformation might be achieved. And each particular conjuncture has its specific qualities and conditions which must be analysed carefully before political action is possible. These strategies also depend on the state of development of capitalism in a given society, the nature of the power bloc, and the alliance of forces against these interests.

In 'Part Three',⁷²⁶ Poulantzas moves in another direction to consider the economy and the State. Poulantzas claims immediately that what we are witnessing in the politics of his day is the emergence of *statism*.⁷²⁷ The emergence of this new level of state activity is a result of a change in the economy, and this shift is of the utmost political importance. The neo-liberalist view is that the State has now reached technical perfection that allows it to ride out the many economic and political crises that comes its way. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There has been, Poulantzas tells us, widespread discussion about the role of the State in furthering the accumulation and reproduction of capital in the present (1978) phase of monopoly capitalism. But this phenomenon did not begin with monopoly capitalism, but was already present in earlier stages of capitalist development. But certainly a qualitative shift has recently occurred. A series of fields, once thought to be separate from the State, have now been incorporated into its structure. These fields include the training of labour power, town planning, transport, health, the environment, which are receiving the State's attention in a new way.⁷²⁸ What seems to be of paramount importance is that the role of the economy in state activity has now become predominant. This raises issues for the state apparatus in which its economic role, and its role in achieving consent, are now at odds. Indeed, Poulantzas goes so far as to say that the economic well-being and interest of society in general is now being threatened.⁷²⁹ It now becomes impossible to square the economic wellbeing of society in general with the economic wellbeing of the dominant social class. One of the consequences of these changes is the diminution of the role of parliamentary democracy and the institutions of democratic process in favour of the power of the executive, and the reduction in the power of political parties. There are false arguments around that suggest the State is splitting into two – a technical component of the state dealing with merely administrative issues, and then a separate 'State' which deals with political-economic questions. This is also clearly a misguided view. There is no neutral, technical-administrative element of the State. The class struggle penetrates the State through and through, and no technical elements can be separated out as 'merely administrative'.

It appears that the State is presently intervening into economic affairs to counteract the falling rate of profit.⁷³⁰ Some theorists of the left have argued that this problem no longer affects contemporary capitalism. But it is Poulantzas's view that this trend is merely a tendency, not an iron law, and that

⁷²⁶ *SPS*, pages 163-199.

⁷²⁷ Italics in the original, page 163.

⁷²⁸ This list is provided on page 167. It is not at all clear whether he is referring here to the neo-liberalization of these areas under the State's management, or to direct State control of areas not previously within its purview.

⁷²⁹ *SPS*, page 169.

⁷³⁰ *SPS*, page 173.

it is this tendency that the State is presently resisting. Contemporary thinking now suggests that what is happening is that the main forms of state interventions, which include state subsidies and investments, certainly support monopoly capital by resisting the falling rate of profit. The State is thus assigned the role of reproducing labour power, which now involves a whole series of tasks - education, health, training, transport, social welfare, urban development and collective consumption.⁷³¹ Much of this discussion he has been covered already in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, so they are only briefly touched upon here :

These measures make of the State the direct promoter of the concentration and centralization of capital ... which ... involves important changes in the relations of production.⁷³²

These changes alter the way labour is produced and shift the locations in which profits are made. The process allows technological innovation, and the further exploitation of labour. Not only this, but the State is also active in the process of consumption. This is especially important in the support of the collective wage, which is indicated by the benefits collectively available in housing, health, transport, education and so on, compared to the private wage the workers gain from an employer. All these measures improve the productivity of workers, and thus aid the relative surplus value being accrued in the productive process. Thus the State is drawn more and more into the productive cycle. The shift into collective consumption is thus not merely a technical matter, but a way of guaranteeing profits for monopoly capital. The management of labour power constitutes a new stage in the economic activity of the State.

What, then, is meant by *statism*?⁷³³ While this is not a linear trend, it seems to suggest an enlarged role for the State, especially in economic life, that aims to secure profits for monopoly capital, and ensure the reproduction of labour power.

The movement of the State into the realms of collective consumption is a deeply political move. It cuts across the hegemony that monopoly capital enjoys in other realms of the State. This allows us to see more clearly the range of the statist moves. It is largely taking place in the field of the reproduction of labour power. When we consider the relation between economics and politics,⁷³⁴ we must ask the question – why does the State intervene in some areas and not in others? This is particularly interesting since there are few economic activities that the State can carry out on its own. Often the argument has been made that the State takes on unprofitable activities. But the areas of activity vary with historical circumstances, and to some extent this explains the variation in State involvement. Indeed, the State does act in areas which are profitable for capital, and so the ‘unprofitability’ argument does not hold for all cases. Generally speaking, the State intervenes when needed to reproduce the social capital of society as a whole.⁷³⁵ When society as a whole is threatened, the government intervenes, even in highly profitable arenas, such as the oil crisis in the 1970’s in the United States. In every case, the interventions largely advance the interests of monopoly capital, though they do, at the same time, maintain the stability of society as a whole. But the major moves that the State is making concern the popular masses. The State does intervene when large companies are threatened, under the guise of the management of the workforce for those employed here, as in the case of Renault in the 1970s in France. In addition, the State intervenes in

⁷³¹ This list is provided on page 176.

⁷³² *SPS*, page 177.

⁷³³ The term *statism* is always cited in italics in the original. This citation is on page 179.

⁷³⁴ Part Two, Chapter 2, pages 180-189.

⁷³⁵ This last phrase is used on page 181.

the reproduction of labour-power through the process of retraining in such circumstances. But its interventions cannot be reduced merely to 'welfare state' engagements. Factory legislation is a case in point – in the early days of industrial capitalism, the State was involved in limiting conditions in the workplace which the capitalists failed to limit, and thus were damaging, and threatening to exterminate, their own workforce. The State thus intervened to protect the workforce, and, in the end, the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie. Thus the struggles involving the State range from the workplace to the welfare state and beyond. And these mobilizations depended to a large degree on the mobilization activities of the working class. But in each case, both the popular masses and the bourgeoisie were advantaged by such moves. Thus the entire system of class hegemony and domination is reproduced.

At the same time, all these welfare measures are backed up by the violence of the state, and the willingness to use the police to ensure these policies are followed. Castel has argued that the State is going through a transformation from an authoritarian structure to a more consensual-manipulative model. Thus the State is seen as moving from the old semi-military régime of the workhouse to the more loosely structured networks of social workers and health care systems. But this shift may result in a form of symbolic repression in which each citizen watches every other citizen, and we are no freer than before, even if the system of repression has changed its form.⁷³⁶

The education and training that the State now employs has a powerful ideological element built into it, an element that sharpens the division of labour between those engaged in mental work, and those who are manual workers. Poulantzas then describes, in the most abstract terms, the way in which the welfare state works differentially on behalf of various class fractions.⁷³⁷ A rise in the productivity of labour, he concludes, requires the submission of the working class to capital. It requires more workers, and a strengthening of the ladder of qualification into skilled and unskilled, the expansion of the mental/manual labour split, and changes in technological innovation. These changes are closely connected to the changes in the welfare state we have rehearsed above. All these measures are embedded in the 'institutional materiality' of the State :

The institutional structures of health (Social security, medical practice, hospitals, asylums) social welfare, town planning, community services and leisure are all stamped with the bourgeois 'seal'.⁷³⁸

In 'The Limits of the Moloch-State',⁷³⁹ Poulantzas examines the limits of state intervention into the economy. In this analysis, he guards us against the image of the 'omnipotent state' which can plan its way towards socialism, a view that left technocrats were taking at that time. The present State is not omnipotent, but is limited in a variety of ways. The State only exists to protect the core activities of capitalist production and reproduction. Thus it cannot directly intervene in the productive process. It can only provide the conditions under which such production can take place. Thus, in a sense, the State acts after the forces and relations of production have been set down, and works in an ad hoc fashion to support such activities as conditions arise. Thus in the planning

⁷³⁶ A change has clearly occurred, but Poulantzas does not seem clear about the nature of this change. He seems to be following Foucault into 'networks of power' arguments, but he does not clearly state where he stands in these arguments.

⁷³⁷ See especially page 187.

⁷³⁸ *SPS*, page 189.

⁷³⁹ Part Two, Chapter three, pages, 190-194. The term 'Moloch-State' is a curious one. Moloch is a biblical name referring to a God engaged in child sacrifice. In general terms, it refers to a deity or power demanding the highest sacrifice. In this case, it perhaps refers to a vision of a State requiring complete obedience and subservience.

process, it is not in a position to predict, with any certainty, what will happen, only what may be needed.

Profits on capital set the limits on what the State can do, as do the demands of the popular masses for resources. Even when the State takes over control of most of the private sector, all that happens is the rise of state capitalism.⁷⁴⁰ Gaining this position would give rise to a host of resistances, both from outside the State and within, and it rarely happens. The resistance of the bureaucracy in this movement towards state capitalism results from its complete compliance in a previous era with bourgeois production and its concomitant supports.

What, then, can be said by way of ‘Provisional Conclusions’?⁷⁴¹ If the left were to come to power, what would the role of the State be? Not only would bourgeois control of the economy need to be wrested away from them, but the State apparatus itself would need to be transformed. The sheer inertia well known in the State apparatus would ‘weigh heavily’ on a new leftist régime. Could, indeed, the change in ownership of the core activities of the economy take place without a flight of capital and the other inevitable problems? Could a wealth tax be installed effectively? But then, in addition, how could the State itself be changed satisfactorily? Clearly the State on its own cannot make this happen. The popular masses would have to become involved. In one view, one that sees the State as merely a technical apparatus, the popular masses can come to control the State through a process of self-management, a sort of rank-and-file democracy, bringing the technocrats under ‘mass supervision’.⁷⁴² But direct democracy has many difficulties, and the needed changes cannot occur simply through this process. The very nature of the state economic apparatus presents further challenges. Changes must affect all the elements of the State. The State will still need to secure the workings of the new economy, but now under very different conditions. Many critics claim that the ‘Super-State’ can be crushed by an attack of popular forces. But there is no perfect ‘technical’ side of the state that can be kept, and a ‘bourgeois’ part that can be destroyed. All are part of a whole. The only way forward is in stages, transforming the whole bit by bit.

The fact that this road to socialism is democratic allows the bourgeoisie to sabotage it at every turn. The economy must be kept going, because without it, all is lost. Experiences in Chile and Portugal are useful to learn from here. The loss of the economy could lead to the loss of revolutionary gains.

Poulantzas now concentrates on a theme that has hovered in the background since his writing in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, and this is the rise of a new form of authoritarian statism. As a child of the dictatorships, and with a deep interest in the fascism of the past, there is a part of Poulantzas’s thinking that believes that dictatorship is the natural condition of capitalism, and that it will return there in times of crisis in order to survive. In Part Four,⁷⁴³ he returns to this theme in a section he calls ‘The Decline of Democracy : Authoritarian Statism.’, and extends his argument on the present state of capitalism. Again, the shadow of the ‘new philosophy’ and of Foucault is never far away. He begins in this fashion :

Some of our latter-day power theorists have just discovered the Gulag. We can only congratulate them on this ; they may have taken their time, but it is never too late to do the right thing. However, judging by the current function of the term, we may suppose that had Gulag not already existed, it would be

⁷⁴⁰ *SPS*, page 193.

⁷⁴¹ Part Two, Chapter Four, pages 195-199.

⁷⁴² This term is used on page 196.

⁷⁴³ Pages 201-247.

necessary to invent it. Otherwise, how could one dare, when talking about our present western societies, even to utter all the nonsense about advanced liberal democracy and ‘permissive societies’ – societies, by the way, whose virtues have simultaneously and very conveniently been discovered by our ‘new philosophers.’⁷⁴⁴

We see again the polemicism that haunts his work. Since the earliest days of *Political Power and Social Classes*, we have seen in his style a capacity to debate and argue throughout his texts. This is not simply a reference to other similar works in the field. Instead, it is an extended debate with other views that never ends. In *Political Power and Social Classes* the purpose of the debate was to correct and add to the master texts. At the last, in this book, it is ward off enemies, and to reassert the value of his own work.

He believes that the ‘new philosophers’ are deluded if they cannot see the authoritarian qualities of the western democracies. What he sees rising all around him is a new form of state to which he gives the term ‘*authoritarian statism*’.⁷⁴⁵ This means intensified control of larger areas of the social realm, combined with a decline in democracy, and of the ‘formal liberties’. This is a trend he sees occurring in all western capitalist countries because of the crisis in international capitalism. Something fundamentally important is occurring in the class structures of these societies to make this happen. And these changes make any change to the left, any socialist revolution, even less likely than before. Though the current crisis he is writing about appears to be of real importance, it is hardly the death rattle of capitalism. The whole weight of his theoretical argument for the last fifteen years has been against such a view, and supportive of the notion that the capitalist state is immeasurably flexible, and able to support the uncertain and shaky economic apparatus through thick and thin. Thus he characterises the State as ‘Strong/Weak’,⁷⁴⁶ able to flex its muscles or disappear behind the curtains as required by the needs of the system. There is a strong version of Marxist functionalism at work here, though he spends some time in this chapter criticising orthodox functionalism. Thus the State is not in crisis, but merely changing its form to deal with the present economic shifts. And, if we are thoughtful, the present situation offers opportunities for the Left.⁷⁴⁷

Is this new authoritarian statism a form of totalitarianism, as some ‘new philosophers’ have proposed? These theorists were willing to call France’s social democracy ‘fascist’ in 1972, and they were wrong to do so, even though this social democracy is hardly a progressive move forward to a new liberalism. There are perhaps elements of fascism in the present situation, especially, perhaps, in the stages of fascist growth that occurred as these régimes first developed, such as in the early days of the Rooseveltian state or the French Republic, but these societies did not produce a fascist state in the end.

Thus, Poulantzas concludes, the present (1978) conditions of the bourgeois State do not represent a move towards fascism, and as a result of his very detailed work on the fascist issue, his argument bears the stamp of authority. Instead :

(the State) ... *represents the new ‘democratic’ form of the bourgeois republic in the current phase of capitalism.*⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁴ *SPS*, page 203

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid. Italics in the original.

⁷⁴⁶ Page 205.

⁷⁴⁷ This view contradicts the argument that appears two pages before, of course.

⁷⁴⁸ *SPS*, page 209.

Thus this new phase is not fascism, and for precisely one important reason. It does not constitute a decisive defeat for the popular masses that is characteristic of all those moments in which fascism rises to power. This does not mean that fascism will never rise in Europe. Indeed, he wants to claim, every capitalist state has within it the seeds of fascism. But we have not reached that stage in Europe at the present. So authoritarian statism has within it the seeds of totalitarianism – (indeed, Poulantzas refers to the ‘establishment of an entire institutional structure serving to prevent a rise in popular struggles’⁷⁴⁹ without actually saying what this structure comprises) - and if totalitarianism were to arise, it would not need a major change in the structure of the State to bring this about.

This change in the State points to a change in the class structure, but what exactly has happened? First, it is clear that massive inequalities of income and education have developed in many advanced social democracies. Then, there has clearly been a rise in the forms of resistance throughout Europe. And these changes, and increases in inequality have also affected children and the aged, women and various elements of the peasantry, and these shifts have led to other forms of resistance. Further, dramatic changes have also occurred among elements of the dominant classes. Monopoly capital and non-monopoly capitalism are still at odds. The domestic bourgeoisie in many countries are at odds with comprador bourgeois elements entirely dependent on foreign capital.

Given that there are increasing struggles within the power bloc, the State must intervene to secure stability. Thus the State finds itself more and more directly involved with economic activities. As well (as he has commented before) the State is enlarging its activities in town-planning, transport, health, the environment, community service and so on.⁷⁵⁰ The State is also engaging itself to encourage international capital through the development of special areas in which such capital can gain particular advantage. The particular role of the State in securing economic activity is of particular importance. It is almost as if the State is creating an economic crisis, as in the case of unemployment and inflation. It is not clear what Poulantzas is doing here. He appears to be exasperated at the lack of State capacity to manage the crisis, rather than seriously promoting the notion that the State is causing these crises. In any event, the upshot is that there are many sources of unrest that now give rise to new popular struggles.

He turns now to a new question – what is the relationship between political democracy and socio-economic democracy? Given that inequality is rising all the time, it is hard to see how the large numbers of people affected can be involved with political democracy. He intends to examine this case with the use of a single example – the State bureaucracy and its relation to the political party system. What has happened, then, in this period of authoritarian statism, is the decline in parliamentary democracy, and an increase in the power of the executive. This leads to a more instrumentalist use of the State by the executive branch. The proposing of laws has now become almost the exclusive task of the Executive, and this process reduces the significance of the law, since it can no longer represent ‘the will of the people’.

Poulantzas then introduces the term *parties of power*,⁷⁵¹ by which he means those large parties who consistently involve themselves in government in a substantial way, and these include the social democratic parties of Europe, as well as the Communist parties in France and Italy. What we appear to be witnessing in the present moment, he argues, is a loosening of ties between these parties and

⁷⁴⁹ This phrase appears on page 210.

⁷⁵⁰ This list appears on page 213.

⁷⁵¹ *SPS*, page 220.

the power bloc. The shift is associated with the narrowing popular base for monopoly capital. Today, the executive dominates control of the State as it in turn manages the power bloc. Strong limits are set on the power of parliament, and parliamentary authority has everywhere been curtailed. In addition, the close connection between elected representatives and the State has also been reduced. Thus it is no longer possible in many cases for representatives of the people to intercede directly on behalf of citizens through the agency of state connections. The State has become a 'water-tight container'⁷⁵² that no longer allows outside influences to impede its actions as before. Thus political parties and their agents are both excluded. In the French case, the familiar structures of the ENA⁷⁵³ and similar grandes écoles produce graduates that inhabit the ministries and, with their ministers, who may well have gone to the same schools, manage the State. Indeed, the ministers themselves appear sometimes to have little authority over their departments. This conception may not be true, of course. None the less, something significant is going on, and this significant shift is the increasing control of the upper echelons of the State by elements in the Executive under authoritarian statism, and the bureaucracy's increasing independence from parliament.

The State thus has an enhanced role, not just as a bureaucratic apparatus, but as a site where policy is made. Various economic interests are now directly represented by elements of the State. And the key issue is not the social origins of the managers of the State, but the fact that large economic interests are represented within the State as a whole. It thus becomes the State's responsibility to represent an ever-narrowing interest, monopoly capital, as if this narrow interest represented the wishes of the people at large. But this does not mean that other class interests are not involved. Other elements of bourgeois interests have their representation within the State, and the reformist trade unions, as in the case of Sweden, can be closely aligned with the State. Secrecy has now become the order of the day, and provides a shield behind which the State can act unobserved. Under this umbrella, within this shroud, the State now acts to determine policy and the future direction of the social formation.

None of this is perhaps surprising, Poulantzas argues. The State has always resisted parliamentary democracy. This means popular demands now face more obstacles than before. This also means that power is more and more concentrated at the heights of the administration and in the Executive. All this has powerful effects on the so-called 'democratic liberties'.⁷⁵⁴ This results, too, in the personalization of the Executive, and something of a 'cult of personality' embodied in the figure of the leader in some instances.

All this must be considered, Poulantzas insists, as a tendency rather than an iron law. Still other interests play a part. There is no monopolistic 'Super-state' developing in the hands of monopoly capital. Instead, the same contradictions still exist throughout the State, but with a different concentration and a different emphasis. Today, instead of genuine parliamentary control, we have a condition in which the plebiscite or referendum are used to establish legitimacy, and in which the media play a significant role. In addition, the political choices available are now reduced to two parties in most countries, in which the two dominant interests swap power with consistent regularity, and who exclude every other interest. These parties become the sounding boards for ideas, but decisions are routinely made by the Executive. All these shifts move societies from social democracy towards authoritarian statism. The parties were always a useful mechanism in providing

⁷⁵² His phrase, page 223.

⁷⁵³ ENA is the École nationale d'administration, an institution of higher learning where élite civil servants are trained.

⁷⁵⁴ His phrase, page 227.

some control over the Executive. This reduced role thus shifts the basis of power dramatically from the popular masses towards narrow interests. This leaves parties with few choices. Either they subordinate themselves to the administration, or else give up any sense of power at all. It is not surprising that there is considerable distrust of the parties at present.

In 'The Dominant Mass Party',⁷⁵⁵ Poulantzas examines the way in which certain parties have become the party of the State, as with Gaullism in France. But even when a party changes the personnel of the State at the higher levels after elections, there remains a good deal of resistance to change within the State apparatus. The State is never universally transformed into the State of a particular class or class fraction. As one reads this text, it is impossible to believe that this argument does not directly contradict the argument in the earlier chapter, in which the demise of parliamentary parties is being discussed with an air of loss and dismay. Here the case is being made that the state party needs to manage the state bureaucracy, give it direction and maintain hegemony, an argument that chapter two seems to contradict. For example, Poulantzas comments :

The dominant party plays the role of policing the administration – of watching over and protecting the bureaucratic apparatus.⁷⁵⁶

It is entirely unclear what Poulantzas is arguing here. At first glance, he appears to be continuing his argument from the earlier paragraph concerning corporatism, but he clearly argues that even in corporatism the party does not control the State. Then, by the next page, it is more obvious he is talking about contemporary France, De Gaulle, Giscard D'Estaing and social democracy. Thus the confusion with his previous chapter remains. The dominating party, he claims, does not need to represent the simple interests of monopoly capital. They already have mechanisms throughout the State by which they can achieve their goals. So the main problem for the State is that it is now so deeply politicised that it is hard to argue that it still represents the needs of the people at large, rather than the narrow interests of capital. At this stage, the administrative positions, and particularly senior positions, come under direct threat, and, rather than following civil service rules, patterns of meritocracy and traditional hierarchy, new agents are inserted into the structure of the State, difficult incumbents are shunted to one side, and a new State is slowly formed. As a result, civil servants now gravitate towards the dominating party, forming a two-way flow of individuals. Thus the government and the dominant party now come to be controlled by the civil servants. A variety of kinds of corruption are thus inevitable.

Dominant parties rule for a long time without change, as in the cases of the UDR⁷⁵⁷ in France, and the Christian Democrats in Italy and Germany. Even when two parties are involved, and swap control of parliament, as in the example of Great Britain, there is such a circulation of personnel between the State and parties that the total system comprises a single circuit of control that 'functions as a *single-party centre*'.⁷⁵⁸ These connections go well past personal connections and shared biographies – such practices are rather embedded in the structures of the parties and in the materiality of the State itself. But in this case of one-party domination there is the capacity to

⁷⁵⁵ Part Four, Chapter Three, pages 232-240.

⁷⁵⁶ *SPS*, page 235.

⁷⁵⁷ *Union pour la défense de la République*, a center-right party in France dominated for many years by De Gaulle. It lasted from 1968 to 1976. De Gaulle had his own party prior to this time, (The Rally of the French People - *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* or RPF), and after 1976, it was rebuilt by Jacques Chirac as *Rassemblement pour la République*, or RPR.

⁷⁵⁸ *SPS*, page 235.

establish direct domination of the State, and to identify those outside the broad umbrella as the 'other'.

The question arises concerning the alternatives that exist in such a system. Given that the dominant parties are all 'much of a muchness', genuine alternatives outside the dominant discourse are limited. And while Poulantzas is not willing to call the present state of the State a form of disguised totalitarianism, he is clearly claiming that we are getting close. There emerges a close and symbiotic relationship between the 'dominant mass party'⁷⁵⁹ and the State, and what is important here is the nature of the mass party. It cannot afford to be openly ideological but must rather retain the flavour of a 'large tent' strategy, within which many interests might be served. But at the same time, this symbiosis is connected very closely to the decline of democratic processes.

The consequences for the Left, and especially in France, are clear. One problem is that parties of the Left may be led into taking up the role of the dominant mass party. But unless that State can be dramatically altered by the Left in power, there are negative consequences to follow. This is especially true for the Socialist party in France.

Authoritarian statism has a series of important consequences :

... greater exclusion of the masses from the centres of political decision-making; widening of the distance between citizens and the state apparatus, just when the State is invading the life of society as a whole ; an unprecedented degree of state centralism ; increased attempts to regiment the masses through 'participation' schemes ; in essence, therefore, a sharpening of the authoritarian character of political mechanisms.⁷⁶⁰

More than this, Poulantzas argues, the State is engaged in finding new ways to manage the populus, and this leads to a condition that is far away from its traditional role of establishing the law and other practices that enable free, separate and autonomous citizens to emerge into the modern world. These new matrices of power⁷⁶¹ spread everywhere, both within the structures of the State, and well beyond. Thus authoritarian statism is not fascism, or even a precursor to fascism, but it is none the less a new form of state compared to its social democratic precursor.

In 'The Weakening of the State'⁷⁶², turns the previous arguments on their head, or more accurately, modifies the previous argument. We have been hearing for pages now that the contemporary State is strengthening, and that statism is everywhere developing. We hear that the State is permeating all forms of social life, gradually expanding its role further and further into economic and social life. Now we hear of its weakening. This is a familiar Poulantzian trope. Having set down an argument with considerable certainty, he now wishes to introduce an element of ambiguity and complexity that we may have missed. Rather, he will now claim that what has been happening is a 'strengthening-weakening',⁷⁶³ and that the State, while expanding its role, is also entering a deepening crisis. The State is now deeply politicised, especially among the top echelons. But at the same time, the State is imbued with deep concerns for the general interest. The changes that have occurred at

⁷⁵⁹ His phrase, *SPS*, page 236.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, page 238.

⁷⁶¹ There are echoes of Foucault's arguments here. There is also a critique of Foucault, again implicit and shadowy, on page 239.

⁷⁶² Part Four, chapter four, pages 241-247

⁷⁶³ This is the term he uses on page 241.

the highest State levels has put this appearance of the general interest at risk. Technical neutrality and political efficiency is put at risk by the economic crisis facing many social democratic states. At the same time, a significant group of senior administrators are allied with the Socialist Party. Social divisions are deepening, and the social cement that used to represent the ideology of the public interest, is now less firmly in place. These tendencies allow certain elements of the State to move in a leftward direction.

The class struggle of the popular classes is now coming more fully into play. This is especially true of the new petty bourgeoisie, the wage-earning middle classes. These groups now find themselves engaged more and more in popular struggles, especially around collective consumption issues, such as health, education and the environment.⁷⁶⁴ And this alliance exacerbates a break between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. Given that these agents of the petty bourgeoisie penetrate the state at every level, the state structure itself is now more vulnerable to transformation. At the same time, the state apparatus is now becoming the target of popular struggles. Now that political parties have been reduced in importance, (though this view is contradicted by some of his own text) the State is openly vulnerable to direct confrontation – the party structures no longer provide a buffer. Thus, what results is a crisis of legitimization.

The State is no longer able to provide the hegemonic cover that monopoly capital requires in order that the State and the economy can flourish unproblematically. With a truly representative party system, conflict can be managed. There is always the hope that the party in question can gain power, and implement the needed policies. Without these mechanisms, conflict is out in the open. Thus government policies become incoherent and piece-meal. Long-term strategy goes out of the window. The administrative structure becomes fractured, as each element in the structure seeks to secure advantage for itself and those it represents. Attempts to serve the public interest are now fragmentary are incomplete, and the national strategy dissolves. Class hegemony is now deeply threatened. Authoritarian statism itself brings into being new forms of popular struggle. There are widespread efforts now to develop systems outside the State, and the emergence of anti-state sentiments that were not there before. These new movements, the women's movement, the ecological movement and other associated groupings, represent political entities that cannot be controlled by the authoritarian State and that represent 'a veritable explosion of democratic demands.'⁷⁶⁵

We have now reached the last chapter of *State, Power and Socialism*, and we meet again a familiar text, 'Towards a Democratic Socialism'.⁷⁶⁶ We have rehearsed the arguments set out here before, and it is sufficient at the present time merely to remind ourselves of what is discussed above in a summary form. We can begin by remembering that this is a highly political article, and that theory is now a long way in the distance. We may have started this long journey in a theoreticist moment, but we are now arrived at political strategy *tout court*.

This is not to suggest that Poulantzas had suddenly discovered politics – quite the contrary. From the very first pages of *Political Power and Social Classes* he has been preoccupied with politics and political strategy, and one could reasonably argue that the entire purpose of his writing is to unlock

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., page 244.

⁷⁶⁵ His phrase, page 247.

⁷⁶⁶ Part Five, pages 251-265. See the discussion above of his 1978 article, *Towards a Democratic Socialism*, NLR, 1/109, May-June, 1978, pages 75-87.

the secrets of the capitalist state in order to gain control of it for the popular masses. None the less, it is also entirely obvious that his early preoccupations were with Marxist science and with completing the theoretical tasks begun by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci. The pendulum has swung now in the other direction, and now, close to his death, his attention is focused almost entirely on 'what is to be done'.

The way forward through the agency of the state seems to be thwarted for the popular masses. And the present analyses from traditional communist parties seems entirely misguided, in his view. And given his claim that class struggle permeates the State, it is clear where the struggle must now take place – *within the state itself*. Thus the State must gradually be won over, and elements of representative democracy may well be retained, along with systems of self-management outside the State. This is the 'dual strategy' he proposes. A leftist government that would support such self-management strategies might do the trick. Here we repeat his final comment :

History has not yet given us a successful experience of the democratic road to socialism ... It can naturally be argued ... that if democratic socialism has never yet existed, this is because it is impossible. Maybe ... But one thing is certain: socialism will be democratic or it will not be at all.⁷⁶⁷

Poulantzas at a Glance

What more needs to be said about *State, Power and Socialism*? Has the book added substantially to the Poulantzian theory of the State, or is it just an attempt to fend off critics 'after the Gulag'? Is it just political strategy, rather than any theoretical elaboration? Certainly his last chapter is predominantly concerned with political strategy, and the rise of the statism movement, both in Western and Eastern Europe. In France, there seemed, according to Poulantzas in 1978, two streams of leftist thought running side by side – the statist one, stretching from the Jacobins through Bonaparte to Lenin, and ending with the contemporary Communist movement, and, by its side, the self-management trend, focused on rank and file democracy.⁷⁶⁸

Here, in his last chapter, he spends some time considering the question of the 'withering away of the state'. Lenin's view was that the existing Russian State of his time must be attacked, to be replaced by the soviets, a second structure which, in turn, will wither away. In this view, the old state must be completely eradicated in order to set up the new order. Lenin was aiming for direct democracy. Poulantzas reminds us of Rosa Luxemburg, the 'eagle of revolution', as Lenin called her,⁷⁶⁹ who criticized Lenin for his exclusive reliance on council democracy, and his willingness to eliminate representative democracy. She thought this approach crushed many freedoms – freedom of the press, free speech, free assembly, free expression of opinion. Only the bureaucracy would remain.

What happened after Lenin and Luxemburg? In the hands of the Third International, everything was twisted out of shape, and an instrumentalist conception of the State emerges. In this view, the State has no internal contradictions, but rather it was to be considered a monolithic bloc.⁷⁷⁰ The

⁷⁶⁷ SPS, page 265.

⁷⁶⁸ SPS, page 251.

⁷⁶⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor, 1961, page 71, cited by Poulantzas on page 253.

⁷⁷⁰ SPS, page 254.

popular masses stay outside the State, and the only way forward is a frontal attack on the existing State-fortress. There is no strategy for undertaking this process, nor any clear indication of the way forward. The State initially exists in parallel with the emerging soviets. The State must be broken down for progress to be made. The State holds all the power, and thus power must be 'taken'. The ramparts, trenches and defences must be captured and replaced by the soviets, and this second power sits outside the State. There is a profound distrust of representative democracy as a tool of the bourgeoisie, so it must be swept away.

But what of the soviets? They are no longer the direct democracy institutions of the past. Instead, the soviets have become a parallel State in the hands of the proletariat. It is managed by a revolutionary party. By this mechanism, Stalinism is brought to life.

Thus traditional social democracy, which distrusts direct democracy, has something in common with Stalinism in that both forms of government deny the value, and are fearful of, the direct control of the masses. What is proposed, therefore, is a new proletarian State run by left intellectuals, technocratic experts – the techno-bureaucratic State. In both cases, there is a worship of the State. Poulantzas proposes, instead, a Luxemburgian solution⁷⁷¹ – keep the social democratic state, in a dramatically revised form, in order to keep hold of bourgeois freedoms, and, at the same time, encourage direct democracy and self-management, a new form of dualism. At least, to be more precise, he tells us that the problem before us now is how to see the transition to socialism through. Gramsci, with his 'war of position' and 'war of movement', did not solve the problem. And it is a problem that is pertinent not just in the West in the so-called advanced societies. In every case, the question is how to achieve a democratic form of socialism. And it seems that Poulantzas is hopeful that in Europe at least, real possibilities exist :

With regard to this socialism, the current situation in Europe presents a number of peculiarities : these concern at one and the same time the new social relations, the state form that is being established, and the precise character of the crisis of the State. For certain European countries, these particularities constitute so many chances – probably unique in world history – for the success of a democratic socialist experience, articulating transformed representative democracy and direct, rank-and-file democracy.⁷⁷²

He then reasserts his familiar claim that the State is riven with struggles throughout its structure, and especially in the contemporary Europe of his time. Power, he reminds us, is a relationship between classes. The State is not an instrument or a thing, but a condensation of forces. All this we know, and have heard many times before. Thus the State must be taken gradually in a series of struggles, and its functions transformed through the systematic infiltration of the state apparatus by the popular masses. This is not, in the Poulantzian view, a reformist strategy, as the Third Internationalists might have claimed. Instead, this is an approach that will lead to the State becoming a terrain on which the popular masses will predominate. The changes must reach across the State into the repressive state apparatus, even though substantial problems exist in trying to bring this change about. But, as in the Portugal case, even the repressive apparatuses have struggles within them, and change is possible.

At the same time, popular struggles must simultaneously take place outside the state if direct democracy is to have any foundation. The two forms of struggle, both within the State and without,

⁷⁷¹ *SPS*, page 256.

⁷⁷² *SPS*, page 257.

must be combined. Authoritarian statism can only be avoided by following the ‘two struggle’ approach.

The State must undergo a sweeping transformation in order for this change to occur, but two major problems present themselves.⁷⁷³ The ‘smashing of the state’, a relic of Marx’s time, has come to mean the destruction of the so-called ‘formal liberties’, and instead, we must now argue that these institutions of representative democracy must be retained. The second issue relates to the transformation of the State itself. It must take place with the direct involvement of the popular masses, not just through the intermediate agencies of the trade unions and through parliamentary means, and there can be no thought that these changes will be minor – they must be transformative. And they must be associated with the development of new forms of self-management. Both initiatives must therefore take place simultaneously. On its own, the transformation of the State alone will lead inevitably to statism. But direct democracy on its own would allow the State to develop separately in a techno-bureaucratic direction. Such views are widespread at the present in Poulantzas’s 1978 depiction of France, a place where some theorists were arguing that the proposed Leftist state that was appearing on the horizon might be chaperoned by a ‘self-management commissar’,⁷⁷⁴ which seemed acceptable to those who held this view because they knew the State would decide in the end. Libertarians liked the idea of the State being smashed and dissolved into many parts. The key issue at stake, Poulantzas claims, is the withering of the state. As the State becomes transformed, and direct democracy unfurls, how will this ‘withering of the state’ occur? The problem still remains that the bourgeoisie will not remain silent, and if the process of transformation is slow, then chances for resistance are increased. The only solution is the arousing of a mass movement, and if this doesn’t occur, there is little possibility of real change occurring. *In this regard, the importance of other social movements long disregarded as secondary, must now be brought into the fray – the ecological movement, the women’s movement, and the anti-racist movement.*⁷⁷⁵ In addition, we must consider how these two processes will be articulated. What must be avoided is the subsumption of one process into the other. In the case of Portugal, such a situation led to two forms of power and the possibility of conflict, and finally to a new type of social democracy, and it could lead, in other cases, to a new kind of dictatorship. In both cases, the State wins in the end. There could always be a fascist reaction to all this, and strong repression. In each of these situations – dictatorship or social democracy – the bourgeoisie wins.

So what is the ‘final solution’? Self-management experiments are taking place all over Europe, but there are no simple answers, and history has not provided an example. We know what to avoid, but we are not quite sure what we want and how to get it. The democratic nature of socialism is paramount, to be sure, and we are certain no iron laws of history will get us there. Risks are everywhere, and we could face ‘camps and massacres’, but this is surely preferable to massacring people ourselves. We could avoid all risk, of course, but then we would be doomed to live as we are.

Poulantzas ends on a despairing note, yet two changes seem to me to have occurred here. There is that moment when he declares, in a moment of wild optimism, that democratic socialism might just have a chance in Europe at that particular time, and perhaps most especially in France. This is an optimism that he rarely, if ever, allows himself, and we shall talk about this more in the context of

⁷⁷³ *SPS*, page 261.

⁷⁷⁴ This phrase is used on page 262.

⁷⁷⁵ My italics, added for emphasis. This is a substantial change in Poulantzian thinking.

French political life at this time below. But, second, he allows space for other social movements to take their place, and not in a secondary fashion, but rather next to the comrades of the working class as essential elements of the popular masses that might ensure revolutionary success. He argues now that the revolutionary party of the working class is no longer adequate to the task, however, much it might seek to change. In one sense, this is only a gestural comment. Nowhere do I see him taking these movements seriously to any extent, or suggesting how the organs of the class struggle and these other groupings might come together in concrete terms. But he is certainly moving in a new direction, and in principle, he is opening the door to creative possibilities.

He talks about this exact issue again in his 1979 interview with *Marxism Today*. Here, he much more clearly suggests that the new social movements must take their place in collaboration with the class struggle if anything significant is to occur, but the details concerning how this might be achieved precisely are still lacking. Nonetheless, this is a very significant step for somebody for whom the entire social dynamic of all human societies is founded in class struggle. He comments :

I think that (the) conception of the party (of the working class) as the unique centralizer, even if it is a very subtle centralization, is not necessarily the best solution. I think more and more that we must have autonomous social movements whose type of organization cannot be the same as that of a political party organization. There must be a feminist movement outside the most ideal possible party because the most ideal party cannot include such types of social movements even if we insist that the revolutionary party must have certain conceptions of the woman question.⁷⁷⁶

Thus this is a shift in his thinking, and a genuine one, a possibility that was never to be realized. But to return to France in 1978. What was it in these political conditions that gave rise to this irrational hope of genuine change in the Poulantzasian breast? We have him talking in an interview in 1978 about the collapse of the Programme of the Left,⁷⁷⁷ a profound setback for the popular masses, yet above we see him outlining the possibilities for social transformation in just the same circumstances. To understand the complexities of the situation, we must return to 1978 and to France, and rediscover what was in Poulantzas's head, as he wrote at during this time, and how these contradictory feelings, both despair and hope simultaneously, came to be present. From the 'New Philosophers' it seemed that the Left was winning, and that Marxism was predominant everywhere. It was not a view shared by many on the Left, though there were grounds for optimism. The Socialist Party (PS) had come into being in 1969 at the Alfortville Congress, and what was most significant at this time was the suggestion that a dialogue be established with the Communist Party. This provided the possibility of a union of the Left. Under Mitterand's leadership, a 'Common Programme' was signed with the Communist party. (the PCF) In 1973, the Socialist Party gained some electoral power, and its leader Mitterand himself almost won the election. By 1977, the Left were winning municipal elections, but they had failed to update the Common Programme of the Left, and while the polls in the 1978 elections suggested they would win the national elections, they failed by a slim majority to gain the necessary advantage. The Socialists gained higher levels of support than the Communists, and the Communists denounced the Socialists because of their alleged turn to the right. Mitterand was later again chosen as the leader of the Socialist Party, and became Prime Minister in the election of 1981, and after his election, the banks were nationalized,

⁷⁷⁶ Page 401, in James Martin's *The Poulantzas Reader*, op. cit.

⁷⁷⁷ 'Interview with Nicos Poulantzas', page 388, *The Poulantzas Reader ; Marxism, law and the state*, edited and introduced by James Martin, Verso, London and New York, 2008. The original interview was with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt, and was first published in *Marxism Today*, July 1979, pages 198-205.

along with the insurance and the defence industries. But these apparently significant socialist successes came too late for Poulantzas to experience. By the end of 1979, he was gone.

One is left, therefore, with a simultaneous sense of incompleteness, despair and, at the same time, with possibilities. There were elements in Foucault's treatment of power that were not incompatible with the Poulantzian vision of the State, though this possibility was never fully realized. A strategy that might, at one and the same time, accede to the power of the State, but simultaneously might argue that the 'institutional materiality of the state' might be comprised of micro-powers, was not beyond the realms of possibility. The possibilities inherent in a coalition between workers, members of the women's movement, ecological activists and anti-racist workers was proposed in the most general terms, but never brought to fruition in his writing. And the possibilities residing in the Common Program of the Left were still alive in 1979. That none of these possibilities could be actualized was a major disappointment, and, in the end, a tragedy for Poulantzas himself.

What, then, at the last, can we say about the contribution that this passionate, revolutionary, profoundly intellectual man provided for the Left? I would argue that three elements of his work are of considerable importance.

1. From first to last, Poulantzas wrote about politics, political strategy and the possibilities of a life beyond capitalism. Whether this interest stemmed from his own family's involvement with Greek autocracy, or whether these sentiments stemmed from more personal sources, is unclear. But what is beyond dispute is that he never ceased to think about the future, from the very beginning of his writings to the very last. He was always urging better thinking about what might happen, where power resided, how the power of the State might be directed in more democratic and communitarian directions, free from domination and subordination. That this future must also be free from capitalism was self-evident from the first. But the questions concerning what the future looked like, and exactly what pathway might be followed, consumed him until the end of his life.

2. His major theoretical contribution lies clearly in his analysis of the State, his arguments surrounding the notions of relative autonomy, the power bloc, and the strategic-relational qualities of the State as the condensation of class forces. A State riddled with class conflict was at the center of his thinking, a State of a society riven with class contradictions that was able to hold the social formation together on behalf of the power bloc, and to disorganize the popular masses simultaneously. This complex structure further provided ordinary citizens with a raft of rights, responsibilities and concrete material benefits as it creates a universe of 'free', individualised, voting members of democracy. Through this explanation, he was able to free himself, and us, from the straight-jacket of instrumentalism that had haunted the Left since the time of Lenin, and provided us with a way forward politically that stemmed directly from this thinking.

3. He was able, at the same time, to reinvent class analysis through his extension of class criteria, more fully than anyone else, into the realms of the political and the ideological. This elaboration on the classics enabled us to envisage classes as cultural and ideological forces, as well as merely instruments of economic exploitation. Thus the epiphenomenal role of politics and ideology in class-structural analysis was pushed to one side, and a new theoretical and political door was opened for us. Whether this opening was the basis for the extraordinary later work on class of Pierre Bourdieu, or the path-breaking cultural work of Stuart Hall is not at all certain. But Poulantzas

certainly contributed to the expansion of the very creative work of the 1980s, and the 1990s that was to come, and in this way he transformed the field of class analysis.

Of course state analysis and class analysis were inseparable in his work. Placed together, these innovations turned orthodoxy on its head. Whether his hopes for a Marxist science were realised is clearly open to debate. It appears to be largely an Althusserian dream that he quickly forgot. Whether he ever answered all the questions he set himself is also clearly open to argument. There were too many questions and too few answers. Whether in his personal and political life he was ever able to respond adequately to the needs of the feminist movement, and the arguments of the women closest to him, including his wife Annie LeClerc, is also unclear. At the end, he seemed to move in this direction without fully elaborating a clear resolution. And whether the New Philosophers and Michel Foucault offered unanswerable critiques of his state-driven argument is also unclear. He seemed almost too willing to give up too much ground to the latest theoretical fashion, because that is what these currents were.

There is an immutability about the State that will not go away. Whether we wish it or not, whether we see the State as a necessary component of democracy or of authoritarianism, no serious political theorist can avoid the task of assessing its role. Poulantzas, more than anyone else in the 20th century, took this challenge head-on, not because he thought the State was the gateway to a socialist paradise, or because he thought it was the devil's workshop, but simply because it embodied human and social possibilities, as well as human and social misery. In either case, understanding it was of the very highest importance, and he gave himself, as much as he could, to this task. This was his contribution.